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**Divine Abandonment
of
Christ and the Soul
in
Byzantine Exegesis
and
Ascetic Literature**

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Ustinov College

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

to the Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

2008

0 1 SEP 2008



Evaggelos Bartzis

Divine Abandonment of Christ and the Soul in Byzantine Exegesis and Ascetic Literature

Ph.D. Thesis abstract

2008

This thesis examines the role that the motif of divine abandonment played in the exegetical and ascetical literature of late antiquity. Divine abandonment of the *soul* was an integral part of the spiritual life. Its “normativeness” was related to the notion of divine *paideia*: God instructed the soul by abandoning the soul to ethical trials. This *paideia* had eschatological implications: divine abandonment highlighted the eschatological orientation of the Christian faith. Divine abandonment of *Christ*, however, is treated in Christological, rather than ascetical, terms. The experience of abandonment by the ascetics was not based on a “Christ-like” ethical model: Christ’s abandonment was only connected to the ascetical abandonment within the scope of divine providence.

The first part introduces the Patristic exegesis on the *Song of Songs*. It shows that Patristic exegesis related divine abandonment of the soul to ethical trials and highlights the role of the motif as part of divine *paideia* that leads the soul to an eschatological ethical perfection. The second part discusses Christ’s abandonment on the cross, which Patristic literature handled with a certain hesitancy, even uncertainty. The last part examines the ascetical tradition. The motif illustrated God’s providential care for the ascetic soul where God remedied the soul’s weakness and led her to the ethical fulfilment in the *eschaton*. This part also addresses the subtle way in which ascetical literature envisaged Christ as a spiritual model.

The conclusion that this thesis draws is that it is within the theological framework of divine *paideia* and eschatology that the Patristic literature understood the notion of divine abandonment. Furthermore, it suggests that it is in this framework of their common tradition that the Eastern and Western spiritual traditions might mutually approach and understand each other.



Dedicated to the memory
of my mother
Athena
(1950-2002)

Αιώνια ή μνήμη

Θα πενθώ μόνος για σένα στον
Παράδεισο

Για σένα μόνο δέχτηκε ο Θεός να μου
οδηγεί το χέρι

Πιο δω, πιο κει, προσεχτικά σ'όλο το
γύρο

Του γιαλού, του προσώπου, τους
κόλπους, τα μαλλιά

Στο λόφο κυμματίζοντας αριστερά

Το σώμα σου στη στάση του πεύκου του
μοναχικού

Μάτια της υπερηφάνιας και του
διάφανου

Βυθού, μέσα στο σπίτι με το σκρίνιο το
παλιό

Τις κίτρινες ντατέλες και το
κυπαρισσόξυλο

Μόνος να περιμένω που θα
πρωτοφανείς.

(Odysseas Elytes, *The Monogram*)

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ABBREVIATIONS

i) Primary Sources

<i>Apophth. (AC)</i>	<i>Apophthegmata Patrum: The Alphabetical Collection</i>
<i>Apophth. (AnC)</i>	-- <i>The Anonymous Collection</i>
<i>Apophth (SysC)</i>	-- <i>The Systematic Collection</i>
<i>Antony, Letts.</i>	<i>Letters 1-6</i>
<i>Apollinarius. FrPs.</i>	<i>Fragmenta in Psalmos</i>
<i>Athanasius, Arian.</i>	<i>Athanasius of Alexandria, Orationes tres contra Arianos</i>
<i>Ps.</i>	<i>Expositiones in Psalmos</i>
<i>Trin.</i>	<i>De Sancte Trinitate</i>
<i>Vita</i>	<i>Vita Antonii</i>
<i>Cyril, ComLk</i>	<i>Commentarii in Lucam (in catenis)</i>
<i>ComJn</i>	--, <i>Commentarii in Johannem</i>
<i>Nest</i>	<i>Libri V contra Nestorium</i>
<i>Chr.</i>	<i>Quod unus sit Christus</i>
<i>Thes.</i>	<i>Thesaurus de Sancta Consubstantiali Trinitate</i>
<i>Damascene. ExpF</i>	<i>Expositio Fidei</i>
<i>Nest.</i>	<i>Contra Nestorianos</i>
<i>Volunt.</i>	<i>De duabus in Christo Voluntatibus</i>
<i>Diadochus, Keph</i>	<i>Gnostic Century</i>
<i>Didymos, Eccl.</i>	<i>Commentarii in Ecclesiasten</i>
<i>Didym. Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>FrPs.</i>	<i>Fragmenta in Psalmos</i>
<i>Epiphanius, Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion</i>
<i>Evagrius, AdMon.</i>	<i>Ad Monachos</i>

<i>De Octo</i>	<i>De Octo Spiritibus Malitiae</i>
<i>Eccl.</i>	<i>Scolia in Ecclesiasten</i>
<i>Gnost.</i>	<i>Gnostikos</i>
<i>KephGn.</i>	<i>Kephalaia Gnostica</i>
<i>Orat.</i>	<i>De Oratione</i>
<i>Prakt.</i>	<i>Praktikos</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	<i>Scholia in Proverbia Salomonis</i>
<i>Gregory, Apol.</i>	<i>Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium</i>
<i>Beat.</i>	<i>De Beatitudinibus</i>
<i>Hom.</i>	<i>Homiliae xv in Canticum Canticorum</i>
<i>Moses</i>	<i>De Vita Mosis</i>
<i>Macarius, Hom.</i>	<i>Homiliae Spirituales 50 [in PTS]</i>
<i>Serm.</i>	<i>Homiliae Spirituales [in TLG]</i>
<i>Typs.</i>	<i>Homiliae Spirituales [in TU]</i>
<i>Maximus, Charit.</i>	<i>Capita de Caritatae 1-4</i>
<i>Lib.</i>	<i>Liber Asceticus</i>
<i>Opusc.</i>	<i>Opuscula</i>
<i>QnD.</i>	<i>Quaestiones et Dubia</i>
<i>Thal.</i>	<i>Quaestiones ad Thallasium</i>
<i>Nazianzene, Fil.</i>	<i>Oratio 30 (De Filio)</i>
<i>Nilus, Com</i>	<i>Commentary on the Song of Songs</i>
<i>Nemesius, Natur.</i>	<i>De Natura Hominis</i>
<i>Origen, Com.</i>	<i>Commentarii in Canticum Canticorum</i>
<i>Hom.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum</i>
<i>Martyr.</i>	<i>Exhortatio ad Martyrium</i>

<i>27Nm.</i>	<i>Homily xvii on Numbers</i>
<i>Princ.</i>	<i>De Principiis</i>
<i>Palladius, Laus.</i>	<i>Historia Lausiaca</i>
<i>Theodoret, EpP.</i>	<i>Interpretatio in xiv Epistulas Sancti Pauli</i>
<i>Expl.</i>	<i>Explanatio in Canticum Canticorum</i>
<i>Psalm.</i>	<i>Interpretatio in Psalmos</i>

ii) Modern Works

ACO	Edward Schwartz (ed.), <i>Acta Conciliorum Œcumenicorum</i> , vol. 1-4 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1914-1974)
ACO ²	Rudolf Riedinger (ed.), <i>Acta Conciliorum Œcumenicorum</i> , Series Secunda, vol. 1-2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984-1995)
ACW	Johannes Quasten et. al. (eds.), <i>Ancient Christian Writers: The Work of the Fathers in Translation</i> (New York NY, Mahwah NJ: Newman and Paulist, 1946-sqq)
CPG	M. Geerard (ed.), <i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum</i> , vol. 1-5, CCSG (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974-1987)
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca (Leuven: 1977-sqq)
CS	Cistercian Studies Series (Kalamazoo MI: Cistercian)
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: Peeters, 1903-sqq)
<i>CthBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
<i>EsChQ</i>	<i>Eastern Churches Quarterly</i>

<i>EsChR</i>	<i>Eastern Churches Review</i>
<i>DSp</i>	M. Viller (ed.), <i>Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: Doctrine et histoire</i> (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932-1995)
FOTC	Thomas P. Halton et. al (eds.), <i>The Fathers of the Church</i> (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America, 1947-sqq)
GCS	<i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte</i> (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1897-sqq)
GNO	W. Jaeger et al. (eds.), <i>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</i> (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952-sqq)
<i>HThR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JThS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library (London: W. Heineman; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1911-sqq)
OThM	Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
OUP	Oxford University Press
PG	J. P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca</i> , vol. 1-161 (Paris: 1857-1866)
PTA	<i>Patrologische Texte und Abhandlungen</i> (Bonn: Rudolph Habelt Verlag)
PTS	<i>Patristische Texte und Studien</i> (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964- sqq)
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherche des sciences religieuse</i>
<i>RSPhTh</i>	<i>Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques</i>
SC	J. Danielou and H. de Lubac (eds.), <i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1941-sqq)
<i>SH</i>	<i>Scripta Hierosolymitana</i>

- SP* *Studia Patristica* (Leuven: Peeters) [some titles under TU]
- SVS* St. Vladimir's Seminary Press
- TLG* *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae Workplace*, Silver Mountain Software, vers. 8, 2000.
- TU* *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1882-sqq)
- VgCh* *Vigiliae Christianae: Revue of Early Christian Life and Language* (Leiden: Brill, 1947-sqq)

INTRODUCTION

Reassertion of the normativeness of Godforsakenness also opens new horizons for exploring the relationship between the spiritual heritage of the East and that of the West.¹

With these words, Nicholas Sakharov concluded his examination of the theme of divine abandonment in the thought of the Russian ascetic, Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov. This was his theological proposal, an invitation to a creative dialogue in order to discern the common traditions underlying the spirituality of the East and the West.² The place of Sophrony Sakharov in modern Eastern spirituality meant that the centrality of the theme of divine abandonment for the ascetic soul in his thought inaugurated a new era of scholarly interest in the motif of divine abandonment as part of Christian spirituality. Most significantly, the term was felt to create a bridge between Eastern asceticism and Western spirituality. The presence of the motif in St. John of the Cross and Sophrony initiated a creative discussion about the place of the motif of God-forsakenness in the two ascetics.

But this is not the only bridge that the motif of divine abandonment provides with modern thought. Most importantly, the theme of divine abandonment is felt to be based on a Christ-like model that has brought the ascetical soul closer to Christ. The experience of divine abandonment, in the case of Sophrony, expresses the intimate bond between Christ and the soul which, in Eastern theology according to Nicholas Sakharov, is established on the notion of the “hypostatic principle”.

¹ N. Sakharov, *The Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony* (PhD Thesis: University of Oxford, 1999), 255. [This introduction and the bibliography included in it follows the discussion of N. Sakharov because he has presented the most complete survey of the modern approach on divine abandonment].

² See J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Théologie 2 (Aubier: Montaigne, 1944), 134. Alongside this positive approach that showed the parallel lines of thought in St. John of the Cross and the Patristic thought of late antiquity, Sakharov indicated a line of reasoning that firmly distinguished the Eastern from the Western spiritual tradition. See I. Hausherr, ‘Les Orientaux connaissent-ils les ‘nuits’ de Saint Jean de la Croix?’, in *Hésychasme et Prière*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 176 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum 1966), 87-128. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991), 197. H. C. Puech, ‘La Ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite et dans la tradition patristique’, in *En Quête de la gnose: La gnose et les temps et autres essais*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 53. M. Lot-Borodine, *La Déification de l’homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs*, Bibliothèque Œcuménique 9 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 86. A. Louth, “Patristic Mysticism and St. John of the Cross”, in *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 179-190.

Nicholas Sakharov has presented the most complete review of modern bibliography with regard to the place of the motif in Eastern spirituality.³ The “normativeness” of the motif of divine abandonment has not been unanimously accepted. The main theological points that Sakharov places his discussion of divine forsakenness between two theological poles: i) the “Palamite” theological filter through which Eastern spirituality has been received by modern scholars; and ii) the theme of “person/hypostasis” that was developed in the middle of the last century.

Although Nicholas Sakharov provides an interesting analysis of the Patristic foundations of the notion of divine abandonment, his main purpose was to develop the concept in the second of the two above-mentioned theological poles. In doing so, he placed the notion of abandonment in its contemporary framework.

Sakharov argues that the theological pole represented by the ‘Palamite filter’ renders the motif of abandonment foreign to Eastern spirituality because of the notion of God’s union with the soul through his divine energies. Lossky is cited as an exponent of this position, among others. According to Lossky, the immanent nature of the divine energies meant that God was always in intimate closeness to his creation. Thus, there could be no notion of divine abandonment: as it is in the case of the sun always radiating, so it was with God’s energies. For Lossky, it was absurd to argue that God was withdrawing his grace: it was the human individual that was closing down to the divine energies due to the presence of sin.⁴ However, to understand divine abandonment in ethical terms in relation to the “Palamite” distinction between the transcendent divine nature and immanent divine energies is, in itself, to evoke a point that remains debatable. The true significance of Palamas’ thought is still to be evaluated for its theological value beyond the historical controversy between Palamas and Barlaam. I have placed the term “Palamite” in inverted commas in order to make this exact point that it is still quite disputed what Palamas did argue. It was the “Palamite” understanding of the ethical life that made

³ Sakharov, ‘Theological Assessment of the Mystical-Ascetic Experience of Godforsakenness and its Integration into the Framework of Eastern Theology through the Teaching of Persona’, in *The Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony*, 217-255.

⁴ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Idem, *The Vision of God*, trans. A. Moorhouse (London: 1963). R. Williams, *The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaevich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique* (PhD Thesis: University of Oxford, 1975). E. Every, ‘Nature and Grace in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition’, *EsChQ* 8 (1949-1950), 21-28. B. Krivoshein, ‘The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas’, *EsChQ* 3 (1938-1939), 26-33; 71-84; 138-156; 193-214.

Lossky reject the “normativeness” of divine abandonment and argue the non-Patristic foundations of St. John of the Cross (and, therefore, by implication of Fr Sophrony).

The second pole of ‘person/hypostasis’ highlighted the “normativeness” of divine abandonment in the spiritual life in terms of the notion of “personhood” in modern Greek theology, or “hypostasis” in the Russian thought.⁵ The development of the notion of “personhood/hypostasis” originated in the *kenotic* theology of the 19th century. This led to the notion that *kenosis* can be found within the Godhead itself, so that the traditional distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia* is more or less elided. Divine abandonment was introduced in terms of the “kenotic” estrangement of the divine persons: the generation and the procession of the Son and the Spirit, respectively, were understood in terms of the Father’s acceptance of their “otherness”. It was this notion of “otherness” in the intratrinitarian relations of the three divine persons that led Bulgakov, for instance, to view abandonment in terms of Christ’s “separation” from the Holy Spirit.⁶ For Balthasar, who employed a kenotic theology not unlike Bulgakov’s, in assuming the sin of humanity, Christ became “estranged” from the Father.⁷

The assimilation of *theologia* and *oikonomia* provided a helpful context for an ontological understanding of the Christian spiritual experience. The “normativeness” of divine abandonment for the spiritual life was due to the “normativeness” of the motif in the life of Christ. The introduction of a “Christ-like” model for the spiritual experience filled the gap that the Patristic literature had left concerning a more ontological understanding of the relationship between Christ and the ascetics.⁸ This is, in part, because the Patristic literature generally upheld a clear distinction between the *theologia* and the *oikonomia*. Thus, the introduction of a “Christ-like” model is not easy to reconcile with the distance between the two theological moments, i.e.

⁵ See Sakharov, ‘Fr. Sophrony and ‘Hypostatic Palamism’’, in *The Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony*, 221-224. G. Florovsky, ‘St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers’, *Sobornost* 4, no. 4 (1961), 165-176.

⁶ S. Bulgakov, *Du Verbe incarné (Agnus Dei)*, trans. Constantin Andronikof (Paris: Aubier, 1943). Idem, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004). Balthasar, *Theodrama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. IV, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco CA: Ignatius, 1994). Idem, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. A. Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

⁷ See Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, trans. E. S. Leiva (San Francisco CA: Ignatius, 1979).

⁸ Lossky objected to the idea that Christ was an ethical model for the early ascetics. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 215. Hausherr challenged Lossky’s position in I. Hausherr, ‘L’Imitation de Jésus-Christ dans la spiritualité byzantine’, in A. G. Martimort (ed.), *Mélanges offerts au R. P. Ferdinand Cavallera* (Toulouse: Bibliothèque de l’Institut Catholique, 1948).

theologia and *oikonomia*, which implies a distinction between the life of the Logos in terms of the *theologia* and the life of the Logos in his *oikonomia*.

Furthermore, although the stereotyped idea of an “existential” West and a “personalistic” East seems to have retreated somewhat at a theoretical level, in practice it remains an important point in the separation and misunderstanding between the theologies of the East and the West.⁹ In his discussion of the ‘dark nights’, Hausherr had highlighted the different approaches in St. John of the Cross and the Patristic literature of late antiquity and the Byzantine period and related them to the notion of divine abandonment, Nicholas Sakharov employed the notion of “personhood” to distinguish between the teaching of St. John and that of the Eastern ascetics.

These are the main lines of thought with regard to the “normativeness” of the motif of divine abandonment in modern Orthodox theology. What this thesis proposes to do is to provide an examination of the degree to which the Patristic literature saw divine abandonment as a spiritual norm. In doing this, the thesis is working on two levels:

i) It shows that the Patristic literature of late antiquity established the “normativeness” of divine abandonment in the spiritual life in terms of divine *paideia*: in all stages of her spiritual life, the ascetical soul remained subject to divine providence which was understood in terms of God’s instructing the soul. This *paideia* was also related to the eschatological message of the Christian faith: divine abandonment introduced the soul to the distinction between the spiritual progress in this present life and the final ethical completion in the life to come.

ii) It addresses the degree to which Christ’s abandonment on the cross was understood as a “Christ-like” model of spiritual experience. It questions whether Patristic literature was capable of making any connection between Christ’s abandonment on the cross and the abandonment of the ascetical soul. This is related to understanding what the Patristic sources actually made of the notion of the “imitation” of Christ. Characteristically, the linking bond between Christ’s

⁹ See D. B. Hart, ‘The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*’, in S. Coakley (ed.), *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Blackwell, 2003), 111-131. See the introductory chapter in C. Gunton and C. Schwöbel (eds), *Persons: Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991). I. Devčić, *Der Personalismus bei Nikolaj A. Berdjaew: Versuch einer Philosophie des Konkreten* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1981). K. Ware, ‘The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity’, *Sobornost* 8, no 2 (1986), 6-23.

abandonment and the ascetical abandonment was the notion of “divine consent” that instructs and leads to salvation.

Thus, the main purpose of this thesis is to show that, for Patristic literature, the “normativeness” of divine abandonment derived from the Patristic notion of the divine providence (*pronoia*) that instructed the soul, and led the latter to her ethical completion.

The thesis is structured in three parts that address independent areas of thought in Patristic literature, namely: exegesis, Christology and asceticism. But this structure is meant to address the potential interactions between the three areas of theological deliberation.

The first part examines the notion of divine abandonment in Patristic exegesis of the *Song of Songs*. It starts with an historical account concerning the character of this book and discusses why, despite its debatable presence in the Canon and its *de facto* exclusion from the liturgical life of the Church, it still attracted the attention of the Patristic exegetes. This part presents the biblical foundation of the notion of divine abandonment as a spiritual norm and addresses the relation between abandonment and sin. The main discussion in this part is dedicated to the exegetical works of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Nilus of Ancyra, which are examined with respect to the motif of divine abandonment. It aims to show that, despite their individual approaches, these exegetes saw divine abandonment as an integral part of the spiritual life. This part provides the “theoretical” background against which the Fathers addressed the idea of divine abandonment. It also highlights the shift that the introduction of more systematic “ascetical ideals” brought to Patristic exegesis. As a result of this shift, “theoretical” deliberation encountered the “practical” application of what divine abandonment might mean for the Christian spiritual life.

ii) The second part focuses on the Patristic interpretation on Mt. 27:46, i.e. Christ’s abandonment on the cross. First of all, this part examines Elliott’s hypothesis that the fate of the exegetical interest on the *Song of Songs* was bound to the Christological debates of late antiquity.¹⁰ In arguing against this hypothesis, we anticipate the explanation that Christ’s abandonment on the cross was not immediately linked to the abandonment of the ascetical soul at either a theoretical

¹⁰ M. Elliott, *Christology in the Song of Songs in Early Church 381-451*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 7 (Tübingen: M. Siebeck, 2000).

(exegetical) or practical (ascetical-spiritual) level. The subsequent discussion involving a thorough analysis of the Patristic sources that interpreted Christ's abandonment on the cross aims to explain the Patristic unwillingness to provide insights to the exact mechanism of his abandonment. It addresses with scepticism Jouassard's position that, after Origen, Patristic literature faced the danger of understanding Christ's abandonment as an act of pretence that did not involve Christ personally. As opposed to Jouassard's conclusions, we demonstrate that Patristic literature addressed Christ's abandonment in a twofold way i) in terms of separation, but without ever exemplifying the subject and the object of this separation; and ii) as a faithful prayer. Thus, the second part addresses the uncertainty with which Patristic literature approached Christ's abandonment due to i) the connection between abandonment and sin in a Christological context; and ii) the unique identity of Christ. Thus, it anticipates the discussion in the third part concerning the degree to which Patristic literature could have formed a firm notion of "imitating" Christ and also point to a "Christ-like" model of divine abandonment.

Both points are discussed in the final part of the thesis. Before that, we bring out some further insights into Origen's ethical thought in order to show the centrality that divine abandonment played in his thought. Then we address the case of Athanasius' *Vita Antonii* and Antony's *Letters* in order to illustrate the two theological stands that shaped the ascetical literature of late antiquity. The next chapter addresses the ascetical literature *per se*. It shows the main lines of reasoning that permeate ascetical discourse concerning abandonment and revisits the position that the ascetical literature had discerned two "kinds" of abandonment. We move to discuss the notion of perfection in the light of divine abandonment and thus highlight the motif of divine abandonment as a spiritual norm in the ethical life. Finally, the third part concludes by seeking to shed some more light on the notion of the "imitation of Christ" for the ascetics. It shows that it was actually the notion of ascetic "humility" that provided the most fruitful grounds for connecting Christ's *kenosis* with the ascetical practice of progressively withdrawing from the society and even the self.

Finally, we summarise and conclude our discussion concerning the degree to which divine abandonment was a spiritual norm in the theological Patristic thought of late antiquity. In doing so, we show the common Patristic grounds in which

Eastern and Western tradition could understand the Christian ethical life as part of God's *paideia*.

PART 1

1. The *Song of Songs* and the Patristic commentators.

The book of the *Song of Songs* has witnessed an adventurous journey from its compilation to its inclusion in the biblical canon for both Jews and Christians.¹ Its status as a canonical book—not to mention divinely inspired—had been put under criticism. It is only after the third-fourth century A.D. that a place among the other canonical books of the Old Testament was granted to it.² The history of interpreting the book is closely related to rabbinic disputes about its value and also to the interaction between rabbis and Christians with regard to the compilation of the Hebrew and Christian canons in late antiquity.³ Its imagery is picturesque, quite sensual, and this fact became the stumbling block for rendering any religious value to its literal content. However, it was felt that the book invited an allegorical reading. In viewing the *Song* as an allegory of spiritual mysteries, the rabbinic tradition established its spiritual nature and also, illustrated its conformity with the rest of the Hebrew canon. However, Cohen has taken a step back by questioning the reason that

¹ For an introduction to the author, date and setting of the *Song of Songs* see R. S. Hess, *Song of Songs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 17-22. For its status among the Hebrew and Christian biblical canon see Lee M. McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Massachusetts MA: Hendrickson, 2007). S. Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden CT: Archon, 1976). E. E. Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 54 (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991). See *The Midrash Rabbah: Esther and Song of Songs*, vol. 9, trans. M. Simon (London: Soncino, 1951), 18 (footnote no. 5) [hereafter, *The Midrash*].

² Even after that date, its perception from Christian authors remained equivocal, as the case of Theodore of Mopsuestia suggests. Cohen and Gilbert argued that after the council of Jamnia (c. A.D. 90) the *Song of Songs* enjoyed a canonical status. See G. D. Cohen, 'The *Song of Songs* and the Jewish Religious Meantality', in S. Z. Leiman (ed.), *The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible: An Introductory Reader* (New York NY: KTAV, 1974), 262. S. L. Gilbert, *The Targum of the Song of Songs: A Study in Rabbinic Biblical Interpretation* (PhD Thesis: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977), 4-5. However, *pace* Leiman, McDonald has doubted the significance of Jamnia for the completion of the Hebrew canon, indicating that "the list of books acknowledged to be sacred continued to vary within Judaism up through the fourth century C.E". McDonald, 'Myth of the Council of Jamnia', in *The Biblical Canon*, 173. J. P. Lewis, 'Jamnia Revisited' in L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 146-192. The work was included to the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Canon (c. 200 B.C). The first Christian witness to the book as part of the Old Testament Canon came from Melito of Sardis (c. A.D. 170). See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26.12-14. See McDonald, 'Myth', 200-201. Also: A. W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1 [footnote no. 1]. R. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985).

³ For the various exegetical tools of interpretation in the rabbinic, early Patristic and modern times see S. O. Fawzi, 'Major Views of Interpretation of the *Song*', in *The Mystical Interpretation of the Song of Songs in the Light of Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (PhD Thesis: University of Durham, 1994), 6-36. Gilbert, *The Targum*, 1-20. Hess, 'History of Interpretation', in *Song of Songs*, 22-28.

someone would have expressed any interest in interpreting it, notwithstanding its sensual imagery:

The problem is, really, why anyone should have thought of treating the work as an allegory in the first place. There must have been works aplenty that were excluded from the canon and that were not interpreted. One must, therefore, ask why the scales were tipped in favour of this particular poem that was *a priori* so religiously questionable.⁴

What Cohen has presented is the fact that various other works were felt to lack a religious content and thus remained unexploited theologically. However, the *Song of Songs* - a work of no particular religious significance in its content- was revisited in order to illustrate its significance as a religious work of spiritual value. Thus, Cohen put under question the mere affirmation that the allegorical interpretation was employed as part of justifying its canonical status. Why was the *Song of Songs* the only puzzling work that attracted the attention of exegetes such as Rabbi Akiba and Origen?

Cohen provided a satisfactory answer which indicated the fact that the content of the *Song of Songs* was felt to fill a theological gap that “no other work in the Bible could fill”.⁵ Cohen has established the importance of the work for three reasons: i) conformity with Pentateuch; ii) content as love song; and iii) interaction with Hellenism. According to him, the depiction of a relation between husband and spouse was already an established device to express the relation between God and Israel in the Pentateuch and also the Prophets.⁶ However, it was only in the *Song of Songs* that love stands at the very core of the narrative.⁷ What is more, such love has taken dialectic form in the *Song of Songs*. Thus, whereas in the rest of the canon, God has addressed Israel and *vice versa*, in the *Song of Songs*, it is felt that God has responded to Israel who, in her turn, has opened a dialogue with God.⁸

In other words, whereas the other books of the Bible do proclaim the bond of love between Israel and the Lord, only the *Song of Songs* is a *dialogue* of love, a

⁴ Cohen, ‘The *Song of Songs*’, 264.

⁵ Cohen, *ibid*, 265.

⁶ Cohen brought forth the dialectical interaction between religious fidelity and infidelity to God as expressed through depictions of loyalty to the husband and ethical adultery. See also Gilbert, *The Targum*, 3. Also, Fawzi, *Mystical Interpretation*, 8-9.

⁷ For the centrality of the theme of love in the *Song of Songs* and the rabbinic exegesis see M. Zlotowitz and N. Scherman (eds.), ‘Love in its Highest Sense’, in *Shir Hashirim: An Allegorical Translation based upon Rashi with a Commentary from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, ArtScroll Tanach Series (Brooklyn NY: Mesorah, 1979), 1-1vii. J. B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry*, Society of Biblical Literature 38 (Missoula MT: Scholars, 1978).

⁸ *The Midrash*, 19 alluding to Sol 1:16-17.

conversation between man and God that gives religious faith a kind of intensity no other form of expression can.⁹

Finally, Cohen turned to the intellectual interaction between Hellenism and Judaism to establish the importance of the theme of love for the ancient world and, consequently, rabbinical interpretation. He has noted that, “wherever the Greek literature and philosophy went, the problems of Beauty and Love went with them.”¹⁰ According to Cohen, an interpretation of the *Song of Songs* with its emphasis on the notion of love as the feature uniting human and divine became an intellectual response to the Hellenic search for *eros*, i.e. the common attribute between soul and divine. It is in its interaction with Hellenism that rabbinic exegetes turned to discerning the theme of love as the mutual union between God and Israel. Thus, the *Song of Songs* was felt to be an Old Testament interlocutor to *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. However, unlike the *eros* of the Platonic dialogues, the *Song of Songs* maintained the Jewish theological agenda of arguing the unconsummated meeting of God and man, where the love between bride and groom as union in one flesh has been avoided, in order to keep the characters of the two lovers distinct.¹¹

Rabbi Akiba advocated the supreme value of the *Song of Songs*: “The whole world is not worthy the day that the *Song of Songs* was given to Israel”.¹² His statement is based on an allegorical interpretation that has brought forward the mystical character of the book. Its value springs from its carrying a spiritual meaning, depicting the loving union between God and Israel. It is the work that concludes human history, depicting Israel’s ascension to God. Behind the sensual imagery the reader needs to discern the hidden meaning.¹³ In this sense, the *Song of Songs* has addressed the spiritual elite.¹⁴ It is confined only to the mature, spiritually speaking, since its sensual/erotic expressions could lead even the more instructed astray. Rabbi Akiba has moved within an established rabbinic tradition where a song

⁹ Cohen, *ibid*, 275.

¹⁰ *ibid*, 277.

¹¹ *ibid*, 279.

¹² Gilbert, *The Targum*, 13.

¹³ For the allegorical and mystical interpretation of the *Song of Songs* see the mentioned doctoral thesis: Fawzi, *The Mystical Interpretation of the Song of Songs in the Light of Ancient Jewish Mysticism*. Fawzi researched on the importance of the *Song* as a mystical work and drew the common lines between the *Song of Songs* and Merkabah mysticism. Also, McDonald, ‘Song of Songs: Hermeneutics and Canon’, in *The Biblical Canon*, 111-113.

¹⁴ Cohen, ‘The *Song of Songs*’, 276.

is the ultimate expression of worshipping God.¹⁵ The *Song of Songs*, with its mystical character, is the ultimate Song that Israel sings when meeting God.¹⁶ That it was called the *Song of Songs* needs to be understood as a superlative indicating its value and also distinct character: it is the Song of all Songs. It concludes them as the supreme Song of the human race.¹⁷ There is a spiritual ladder of ten Songs, found in various places of the canon, leading to higher levels of the worship of God. They also manifest the history of the human/Israelite race on earth after the fall. The *Song of Songs* lies on the ninth step of this ladder, being the highest expression of the worship and glorification of God. One last Song is to be sung, the tenth. It is the Song anticipating the Messianic restoration of Israel.¹⁸ As Cohen has commented:

As the ultimate form of theological expression, it [*Song of Songs*] was comparable to the one moment in the year when the high-priest entered the royal chamber, as it were, the Holy of Holies, and confronted his God privately on behalf of the house of Israel. It was to this supreme religious experience to which Rabbi Akiba compared the effulgence of emotion evoked by the Song of Songs when he said that all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs –the Holy of Holies.¹⁹

Melito of Sardis was the first Christian author to include the *Song of Songs* in his list of canonical books. Hippolytus was the first author to appropriate its content in a Christian environment.²⁰ Yet, the reason that Christians were interested in the *Song of Songs* remains obscure. Hess has indicated that, in the hands of Hippolytus it became a device to communicate ascetical ideals.²¹ For Elliot, it is due to the theme of love that this work was felt to be appropriate for the Christian canon.

¹⁵ Zlotowitz and Scherman (ed.), *Shir Hashirim*, xxii-xxxiii. In fact, rabbinic tradition supported that the *Song of Songs* was composed on the day that the Temple of Solomon was built. The rabbis saw the value of the *Song* in close connection to the importance of the temple. The temple was thought to be the “symphony of creation” and the *Song of Songs* melodically attributed this symphony that united the human to the divine: “Rabbi Yosi began: King Solomon was inspired to compose the Song of Songs when the Holy Temple was built and all the spheres, upper and lower, were completed with one wholeness... and the Holy Temple was built as a replica of the Holy Temple above.” See D. Marinov, *Gregory of Nyssa and Ambrose of Milan’s Commentaries on the Song of Songs: A Comparative Study of 4th Century Christian Mysticism - East and West*, 2, URL: <http://rites.huji.ac.il/mazkirut/Dania.doc>. For Rabbi Simon the title of the work had anticipated the dialectical theme of mutual love in the *Song of Songs*: “[b]eing composed of two strands –Israel’s praise to God and God’s praise to Israel”. See *The Midrash*, 19 [footnote no. 4].

¹⁶ *The Midrash*, 19ff.

¹⁷ F. Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, Bible and Literature Series (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 15-16.

¹⁸ Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Shir Hashirim*, xxxiii [footnote no. 1].

¹⁹ Cohen, ‘The *Song of Songs*’, 275.

²⁰ For a list of the earliest Christian lists of canonical books see Appendices B-1 and B-2 in McDonald, *The Biblical Canon*, 439-442. For a list of late antiquity commentaries on the *Song of Songs* and their editions, see the monumental work of M. Geerard (ed.), *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, vol. 3, CCSG (1979), 125-126. See also Marinov, *Gregory of Nyssa*. For the available commentaries in the Latin world see E. A. Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 203-210.

²¹ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 22.

Christological concerns of late antiquity urged Christian authors to seek for an appropriate language in which they could explain the mystery of the incarnation.²² Thus, it is suggested that Origen used the *Song of Songs* as a vehicle to communicate his speculative Christology, addressing questions concerning the identity of Christ. The language of union and love –a unique theme featured in this puzzling book- was felt to be appropriate to interpret the mystery of the incarnation. Such a position has enjoyed considerable support in modern scholarly circles.²³ However, we need to take into account that Christian exegesis on the *Song of Songs* primarily comprised an interpretation of the scriptures into the light of the incarnation. As DeSimone put it:

(The fathers of the Church) drew from the Sacred Scripture the basic orientation which shaped the doctrinal tradition of the Church, and provided fruitful theological instruction for the faithful. Their interpretations of Sacred Scripture were always of a theological and pastoral nature, relevant to man's relationship to God. The Fathers took the liberty to take a sentence out of its context to bring out some revealed truth which they found expressed in Scripture.²⁴

This is not to say that every passage of the *Song of Songs* became a reason to reflect on Christology. So, why were Christians interested in commenting on the *Song of Songs*?

We need to look at Origen's exegetical interest in order to answer this question. King has shown that Origen was interested in interpreting the *Song of Songs* quite early in his exegetical career. Alongside his *Commentary* and *Homilies*, which are thought to be compositions of later date, Origen had also composed a brief *Commentary on the Song of Songs* which no longer survives. It seems that this work was the first attempt to interpret the scriptures.²⁵ If this is so, then it is interesting to

²² Elliott, *Christology in the Song of Songs in Early Church 381-451*. Also, R. DeSimone, *The Bride and the Bridegroom of the Fathers Subsidi Patristici* 10 (Roma: Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, 2000).

²³ See A. Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, trans. J. Bowden (London: Mowbrays, 1995), 143. Also, H. Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 192ff. For Crouzel's exposition of Origenist Christology in the *Song of Songs* see Origène, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, vol. 1, L. Brésard and H. Crouzel (eds.), SC 375 (1991), 31. See also J.-N. Guinot, 'La Christologie de Théodoret de Cyr dans son *Commentaire sur le Cantique*', *VgCh* 39 (1985), 256-272.

²⁴ DeSimone suggested that from the time of Origen and Jerome onwards the Christians made extensive use of the Jewish tradition to draw the meaning of the Sacred Scripture. DeSimone, *The Bride*, 9-12. However, it seems that, after Origen, it was only Ephrem the Syrian and Theodoret of Cyrillus that made extensive use of the Jewish exegetical resources. See E. Narinskaya, *Ephrem – a 'Jewish Sage': A Comparison of the Exegetical Writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Jewish Traditions* (PhD Thesis: University of Durham, 2007).

²⁵ J. C. King, *Origen and the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage-Song*, OThM (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 6ff.

know why this puzzling book attracted his attention. King has argued that Origen felt that the *Song of Songs* concluded the “spirit of scriptures”. It was felt to be the book that held the summit of union to God through its dramatic form.²⁶ It is due to this fact that Origen applied an allegorical interpretation to the *Song*. Through it, God has been manifested as reciprocal love. It is the theme of love as the intimate nuptial union of two parts that attracted his attention.²⁷

If we are to give any validity to King’s observation that Origen’s first attempt to comment on the *Song* had coincided with his conversion from the pagan literature to the Christian scriptures, then it is apparent that Origen had desired to manifest the *Song of Songs* as the equivalent of the *Symposium*.²⁸ Origen has spotted the centrality of love for the Christian message and also for the pagan sages.²⁹ He has indicated the classical philosophical failures to discuss the theme of love.³⁰ What seems to be missing from the philosophical argument is the reciprocity and dialectical form that love might acquire at a personal level.³¹ It needs to be noticed here that McGinn has observed the crisis that swept across second-Temple Judaism and its contemporary Hellenism. This crisis produced the apocalyptic literature of Judaism and introduced the need of individuals to unite with God at a more personal and reciprocal level.³²

²⁶ Parente argued that, “it is exactly its spiritual and allegorical interpretation that has vindicated to the Canticle of Canticles a divine origin and a place among the canonical books in both Jewish and Christian tradition. Otherwise, how could a book be considered as divinely inspired for our instruction and edification in which the name of God is never mentioned and no religious or supernatural ideas ever seem to occur”? P. P. Parente, ‘The *Canticle of Canticles* in Mystical Theology’, *CthBQ* 6 (1944), 143. King challenged such an idea by indicating that the form and the content of the *Song* as a marriage-song of perfect loving union was felt to have invited Origen to apply the allegorical interpretation to it.

²⁷ According to King, Origen introduced and developed the theme of intimate relation between God and soul within the era of the persecutions: “[f]rom his much later *Exhortation to Martyrdom* we learn of the prominence that he gave to the martyr’s ‘bridal’ status before Christ the Bridegroom, wherein martyrdom and exaltation to heavenly nuptial union become indistinguishable... Perhaps, then, even during the Severan persecutions, Origen had already developed a nuptial understanding of martyrdom and, thus realizing the *Song*’s relevance to the persecution that so preoccupied him, applied himself to a short exegesis of the text at this time”. King, *The Spirit*, 8.

²⁸ King, *ibid*, 8.

²⁹ 1 Jn 4:8. See Origen, *Com. Prologus*, 2.32 [all references in ACW 26 followed by number of book, chapter and page in ACW 26].

³⁰ Origen, *Com. Prologus*, 2.23ff. It is indicative that, in his extensive Prologue, Origen highlighted and discussed the centrality of love for the *Song*.

³¹ Origen, *Com. Prologus*, 1.21. Origen indicated the dialectical form of the *Song*.

³² B. McGinn, ‘The Jewish Matrix’, in *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism*, Presence of God, vol. 1, (New York NY: Crossroad, 1991), 9-22. In Judaism, the book of *Ezekiel* signalled the shifting point to an interest in sacred texts that substituted the destruction of God’s place of cultic worship, i.e. Temple. As Tuell illustrated, the book of *Ezekiel* transmitted the notion of prophecy in written form. Thus, prophecy took the form of written text: “Ezekiel, unlike his prophetic forebears, has written a book... the reader of the text is able to experience what the prophet experienced”. S. S. Tuell: ‘Divine Presence and Absence in Ezekiel’s Prophecy’, in M. S. Odell and J. T. Strong (eds.), *The Book of*

Thus, sacred texts were felt to make the godhead more intimate to the devotee. It is the era when sacred texts were standing in the place of the temple in Judaism. At the other end, Hellenism was substituting the notion of written authority for the Platonic presence of the divinity within.³³ As King indicates, even the gospels were felt to be lacking this centrality of reciprocity.³⁴ Thus, Origen directed his attention to this small book that was meant to become the Christian *Symposium*. Origen's purpose was to set the scripture at the very heart of religious experience.³⁵ At the hands of Origen, the content of the *Song* became a device resembling the Platonic myth. The text invited its reader to move from the ephemeral to the eternal; from external appearances of the text to its hidden meaning. The *Song* led the soul from the depiction of sensual love to divine love. It is indicative that, in a semi-Platonic fashion, Origen tried to show the resemblance between the soul's love and divine love. Thus, through its content, the *Song* communicated something of the divine archetype of love to its reader.

Origen's interest in the *Song* needs to be seen in close connection with his attempt to provide Christians with a distinct religious culture.³⁶ It is indicative that the people of the Old and New Covenants had simultaneously tried to establish their individual biblical canons and provide their interpretation in order to mark their religious individuality and independence. Biblical exegesis became the device through which Christians reflected their own distinct character on the book of the

Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives, Symposium Series (Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 109-110.

³³ In Hellenism, the introduction of the Chaldean Oracles, Hermitism and, primarily, the Neo-Platonic *Commentaries* on Plato expressed the need for written authorities through which the human individual attained union with the divine. See McGinn, *The Foundations*, 14. For an examination of the psychology of religion at late antiquity see E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (New York NY: Norton, 1970). For the shifting to written authority with regard to allegory see R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Classic Heritage 9 (Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1986).

³⁴ King, *The Spirit*, 27.

³⁵ Louth, *Origins*, 54. Louth argued that the *Song of Songs* was "the book on the summit of the mystical life". King slightly differentiated his position by indicating that "Origen approaches the Song of Songs itself, in its manifest intelligibility, as the summit of the mystical life and the supreme textual point of contact and union between the Christian soul and her heavenly Bridegroom". King, *The Spirit*, 36.

³⁶ P. M. Blowers, 'Interpreting Scripture', in A. Casiday and F. Norris (eds.), *Constantine to c. 600*, Cambridge History of Christianity, vol. 2 (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 619. According to Blowers, Christian exegesis meant to "establish a sacred past and credible identity for Christians". Also B. Neil, 'Towards Defining a Christian Culture: The Christian Transformation of Classical Literature', in Casiday and Norris, *ibid*, 317-342. H. de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vols. 1-2, trans. M. Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski, Ressourcement (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998-2000). Fr. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997).

Old Testament.³⁷ The Platonic *Symposium* was missing the theme of reciprocity. The rabbinic interpretation was missing the theme of the incarnation. Thus, Origen applied his reading of the scriptures in the light of the incarnation in order to illustrate the theme of love as the motif *par excellence* that has united the human and divine.

Thus, Origen's interest in the *Song of Songs* was not related to his need to demonstrate his speculative theology in more concrete terms. His exegesis on the biblical *Song* did not become the vehicle through which he demonstrated the more speculative aspects of his thought. His interest was to manifest the conformity of the *Song* to the Christian message. His purpose was to bring into light the fact that the love that the *Song* has demonstrated is related to the archetypal divine love: love has originated from God and has been directed to God.³⁸ Thus Origen referred to its hidden wisdom, i.e. the secret meanings that only the Logos could have illuminated. When Origen addressed the inner meaning, what he had in mind was the presence of Logos as God's Wisdom. Thus, the reader is not invited to read the *Song* as an allegory that would introduce him to something different from the Logos himself. The fact that Origen turned to the classical form of *Commentaries* is indicative of his attempt to illustrate the tools through which his reader could have discerned the presence of the Logos behind the obscure passages of the *Song*.³⁹ Hence, the classical *Commentary* genre became a tool with which Origen could illustrate the inner coherence of the *Song's* obscure content. Blowers has indicated that Christian *Commentaries* in late antiquity had acquired a twofold function: i) contemplative and, ii) performative. In their first function, they had illustrated a "comprehensive vision of God's revelation to and in the world". In their latter function, they had

³⁷ For an interesting illustration of the intellectual interaction between Origen and his contemporary rabbis see N. R. M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish Christian Relations in the Third-Century Palestine*, Oriental Publications 25 (Cambridge: CUP, 1976). Y. Baer, 'Israel, the Christian Church, and the Roman Empire: From the Time of Septimius Severus to the Edict of Toleration of A.D. 313', *SH* 7 (1961), 79-149. For a discussion focusing on the interpretation of the *Song* see R. Kimelman, 'Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third Century Jewish-Christian Disputation', *HThR*, vol. 73. no. 3/4 (Jul-Oct. 1980), 567-595. E. E. Urbach, 'The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation', *SH* 22 (1971), 247-275.

³⁸ Origen, *Com.* Prologus, 2.32ff.

³⁹ King, *The Spirit*, 12.

urged to moral *praxis*: the reader had meant to identify himself with the persons presented to him and ponder on his spiritual position.⁴⁰

2. The main characters of the *Song of Songs*: the bride and the bridegroom

As an *epithalamium*, i.e. a nuptial Song, the *Song* praises the love of two persons on the occasion of their marriage.⁴¹ As such, the drama focused on the central characters of the bride and her groom. As the drama unfolds, a group of maidens escorting the Bride is involved, alongside a second group following after the groom. In treating the *Song of Songs* as an allegory, the rabbis argued that the groom was God leading Israel to the promised land, whereas the bride was the nation of Israel.⁴² As Gilbert wrote, Christians “found it easy to extend the Jewish allegory beyond the Old Testament Israel”.⁴³ Hence, as early as Hippolytus, the *Song of Songs* was read within the context of the incarnation.⁴⁴ Christ was the groom and the Church was his bride. Already, Paul had depicted the relation between Christ and his Church in terms of the relation between groom and bride.⁴⁵ Patristic commentators had no doubts about the identities of the participants in the biblical drama.⁴⁶ Christ was the groom, and the bride was the individual soul/Church. The group of maidens was composed of uninitiated souls, and the second group was constituted by angels and prophets.⁴⁷

All Christian commentators agree that the groom was an allegory for Christ, the incarnate manifestation of God.⁴⁸ From the time of Irenaeus onwards Christ was

⁴⁰ For the classical commentaries on Plato see Lamberton, *Homer*, 63. Also Neil, ‘Christian Transformation’, 326. The Neo-Platonic commentaries illustrated the tensions and inconsistencies of a text as “perfectly reasonable and consistent” with the purposes of the commentator. Blowers, ‘Interpreting Scripture’, 619. Origen, *Com.* 1.5.89 and also 3.8.198: “if there is anyone who has at some time burned with this faithful love of the Word of God; if there is anyone who has received the sweet wound of Him who is the chosen dart...”. Origen, *Hom.* 1.7.279-280.

⁴¹ Gregory, *Hom.* 1, 22 [references indicate *Homily* number and page in GNO 6]. D. Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, CS 156 (1995), 83.

⁴² Gilbert, *The Targum*, 3. Elliott, *Christology*, 4.

⁴³ Gilbert, *ibid*, 6.

⁴⁴ DeSimone, *The Bride*, 30ff.

⁴⁵ Eph 5:22.

⁴⁶ Byzantine commentators did not share the same confidence about the persons participating in the dialogues. This was due to the obscure character of the dialogues.

⁴⁷ Theodoret followed the scheme: Groom=Christ, bride=Church (perfect soul occasionally), maidens=pious souls, followers of groom=angels. Theodoret, *Expl. Præfatio*, 44D and 1.64A [reference in pillar numbers in PG 81]. Origen believed that the maidens were allegories of the imperfect souls. Origen, *Com.* 1. 4.119.

⁴⁸ It is entirely not within the scope of this thesis to present the problem of the identity of Christ with regard to the person of the Logos and the number of his natures. For a thorough analysis on the issue of Christology in the *Song of Songs* and the part that Commentaries on the *Song of Songs* played in

presented as the author of the two testaments. In the *Commentaries*, Christ stands at the middle of the two testaments, uniting them. According to Turner, for the Patristic commentators, the identity of Christ was related to the eschatological perspective of the Christian faith: he was the always-awaited saviour, long-awaited, yet always present.⁴⁹ His coming had been foretold through types, prophecies and theophanies in the Old Testament. He came in the New Covenant, to depart again, leaving the promise of his second coming to the faithful. After Origen's exegesis, Christ was the Logos that descended to human history. In his presence, he unified human history leading time to redemption. He condescended to the weakness of his bride, in order to lift her up. Primarily, the Logos provided knowledge of the true God and thus his role needs to be viewed in terms of the soul's conversion from idolatry to the true faith. Hippolytus was the first commentator to stress the juxtaposition between the old synagogue and the Church, placing Christ in the middle.⁵⁰ It is through the Logos that the bride learned about God and she ascended to his knowledge.

The bride was a multifaceted character for the Patristic commentators of late antiquity. According to individual exegetical viewpoints the person of the bride ranged from the Church, to individual souls and even Mary.⁵¹ Origen presented a fair balance between the Church and the individual soul. The one allegory was part of the other. That is to say, in Origen's scheme, the Church is the congregation of individual souls. And again, individual souls have achieved spiritual perfection only

shaping Christological formulations in the early Church see Elliott, *The Song of Songs and Christology in the Early Church 381-451*. Elliott examined the case that the *Song of Songs* was employed in order to abstract from its imagery an idea of the union between human and divine in Christ. Christ's soul was the representative of all humanity. It was through it that the Logos was united to his humanity. The fact that there was a declining interest in composing *Commentaries* on the book after Chalcedon (A. D. 451) was considered to be the result of seeking for more precise Christological expressions that the imagery of the *Song of Songs* seemed to lack. However, this position overlooks the fact that, as was illustrated earlier, the primary interest of the commentators, such as Origen, was to establish a Christian correspondence to the Platonic theme of *eros* in the *Symposium* and thus, provide Christians with a cultural identity. Also, as Louth has put it, "Origen's real concern was with the interpretation of the Scripture. This was the repository of all wisdom and all truth, and the interpretation of Scripture lies at the very heart of his mystical theology". Louth, *Origins*, 54. See also J. Behr, *The Way to Nicaea, Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Crestwood NY: SVS, 2001). Fr. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*.

⁴⁹ Turner, *Eros*, 85.

⁵⁰ DeSimone, *The Bride*, 30-31.

⁵¹ Elliott, *Christology*, 120. Elliott also included the theme of Christ's soul as an allegory of the bride. However, apart from some passages in Nilus of Ancyra, I do not think that the other exegetes ever employed this allegory. See Louth, *Origins*, 55. DeSimone, *The Bride*, 30 and 38. As Parente noticed, the bride was originally thought to be an allegory of the Church (as in the work of Hippolytus). For this reason, the Christian writers followed the Jewish tradition, but by adapting it to the new reality of the incarnation, they replaced Yahweh with Christ. The synagogue was substituted by the Church. In the course of time, the righteous soul replaced the Church. Parente, 'The Canticle', 146.

within the Church, the latter being the locus in which they have met the Logos. For the purpose of our discussion, we will focus on the bride being an allegory of the individual Christian soul.⁵² What is exactly her character/nature? Why is she distinct from the other souls/maidens? Eventually, why was she chosen to be the bride of Christ? These are the questions that need treatment, before moving to examine the nature of her experience (i.e. dereliction).

The bride was not an allegory of any faithful soul; she was an image of perfection. She was advancing to the virtuous life having turned from idolatry to the true knowledge of God. Though she was not perfect, yet she was advancing to the way of perfection. There were two features that showed her as the bride of the divine groom: i) she was made “according to the image” of the Groom; and ii) she was baptised. These two factors actually interacted in Patristic exegesis. Origen stressed the fact that the soul was the image of the image of God, i.e. the Logos. But she was advancing spiritually because she had turned from ignorance to the knowledge of God. Spiritual life was envisaged as the soul’s way to actualise the gifts of baptism, hence regaining the divine image. Procopius of Gaza, in his exegesis, firmly interwove divine image and baptism:

I introduce you to intellect (νοῦς), which is the house of the mother who, as it were, has given birth to me through baptism, that is, the grace of the all-Holy Spirit, as receptive of this in accordance with the likeness (διὰ τὸ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν); again it (i.e. intellect) is the inner chamber of grace, as the hidden treasures of grace laid down in it in accordance with the “image” (διὰ τὸ κατ’ εἰκόνα); which grace has conceived me through faith.⁵³

It is through baptism that the soul was cleansed and recovered the divine imprint on her. Eventually, this imprint enabled her to approach the groom.⁵⁴

Origen portrayed spiritual life as the soul’s journey from Egypt, i.e. sinful life, to crossing the Red Sea (an allegory of the baptism). In the story of *Exodus*, Israel

⁵² Origen, *Com.* 1.1.58. Theodoret, *Expl. Præfatio* 44D and 1.64A. Gregory, *Hom.* 1, 22. DeSimone, *The Bride*, 40.

⁵³ Procopius of Gaza, *Catena in Canticum Canticorum*, PG 87, 1709 C: “Εἰσαγάγω σε εἰς νοῦν, ὃς οἶκος μὲν ἐστὶ τῆς διὰ βαπτίσματος τεκούσης με οἶα μητρός, τοῦ παναγίου Πνεύματος χάριτος, ὡς ταύτης διὰ τὸ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν χωρητικός• ταμείον δὲ πάλιν αὐτῆς, ὡς τοῦς ἀποκρύφους ταύτης θησαυροῦς διὰ τὸ κατ’ εἰκόνα ἔχων ἀποθέτους ἐν ἑαυτῷ• ἤτις με χάρις συνέλαβε δια πίστεως”.

⁵⁴ All commentators agree that the notion of the soul’s recovering the divine imprint through baptism was seen as an extension of the incarnation and the passion. It was by means of Christ’s incarnation that she was cleansed, due to the fact that he assumed the soul’s human nature. Philo of Carpasus, *Enarratio in Canticum Canticorum*, PG 40, 9 and 11. Nilus, *Com.* 7.13.23 and 77.1.192 [numbers refer to chapter, paragraph and page in PTS 57].

had left Egypt behind by crossing the Red Sea. In the same fashion, the soul departed from every sinful condition. As Louth commented,

[the] ascent of the soul to God begins with her 'coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea', that is her conversion and baptism. The mystical ascent for Origen begins in baptism and is a deepening and bringing to fruition of baptismal grace.⁵⁵

For Nilus of Ancyra, it was through baptism that the soul received divine grace. In her baptism, the soul put off her previous sinful life. Thus, she found the true God. She recovered the divine image within, the one that sin had tarnished. Gregory of Nyssa argued thus: the soul was the image of the Groom. She approached him in order to resemble him. As he put it, "by approaching the archetypal beauty (ἀρχέτυπον κάλλος) you became fair, since like a mirror you have obtained my character (τῷ ἐμῷ χαρακτήρι ἐμμορφωθείσα)".⁵⁶ Thus, the soul's recovery of the image was envisaged within the scope of spiritual life. It was not a given condition. It is a dynamic condition that has followed the soul's ascension to the divine. The more the soul has advanced in her approaching the divine groom, the more she has recovered his image within. The concept of the divine image has placed the soul in close relation to the groom. A part of the soul is kinsman to the groom:⁵⁷ "(The soul became fair) when she approached the good and obtained the image (ἐνεμορφώθη) of the divine beauty".⁵⁸ For Gregory, the soul was identical to the groom in terms of the divine image. In this present passage, the soul was fair and good because the groom was fair and good. In another passage, the Logos that was the dart of the Father had wounded the soul. In her turn, the soul became the dart of the Logos and wounded the uninitiated souls.⁵⁹ Procopius commented on Sol 7:7: "you (the soul) have put on the majestic beauty, i.e. the likeness of the archetype". Due to the divine imprint that

⁵⁵ Louth, *Origins*, 56. See also, J. Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. W. Mitchell (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955), 297ff. For an exposition on the divine image according to Origen see H. Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, *Théologie* 34 (Paris: Aubier, 1956).

⁵⁶ Gregory, *Hom.* 4, 103. H. U. von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. M. Sebanc (San Francisco CA: Ignatius, 1995), 77 [hereafter cited as *Preséance*]. For an exposition of Gregory's thought on the notion of divine image see Balthasar, 'The Definition of Nature', in *ibid*, 111-119.

⁵⁷ See Balthasar, *Preséance*, 89-90 and also 113ff.

⁵⁸ Gregory, *Hom.* 5, 150.

⁵⁹ Gregory, *Hom.* 4, 129. The soul became God's dart.

she carried within, the soul was a vehicle for the groom. The uninitiated souls could contemplate the divine groom through her.⁶⁰

But what truly made the bride stand out was the fact that she accepted the divine call to salvation.⁶¹ The bride was the soul that was working for her spiritual progress. As Origen stated, though she had not reached perfection, she was reckoned as perfect because she was moving in this direction.⁶² Nilus' exegesis was suggestive of this fact: the bride was the soul that had approached the archetypal beauty of the groom through faith and the virtuous life. She had cleansed herself from every bodily care and evil transgression.⁶³ The *Song of Songs* was thought to present the soul's ethical labours in her journey to achieve union with God. Every part of the bride's journey illustrated the soul's spiritual struggles: from sinfulness and ignorance to knowledge and the Christian virtues. This journey was the soul's response to the divine call. Through the incarnation the Logos had invited the soul to union manifesting his divinity. Thus, it was the soul's turn to respond by ascending to her groom. Unlike the bride, the uninitiated souls were neglecting Christ's call. They remained in sinful conditions. It was the soul's spiritual struggle that illustrated her relation to the groom. It has been argued that Origen diminished the role of the body in his exegesis by focusing on the role of the soul. We need to see his exegesis in the light of spiritual and ethical effort. It is through putting off sinfulness --not necessarily the body-- that the soul was advancing spiritually. In Origen, the image of putting off materiality was synonymous to ethical effort. This was the turning point, where the commentators overcame any notion of elitism: through the redemptive work of Christ on earth, every soul could become his bride. Yet, it was only the ethically-working soul that became his bride having accepted his call wholeheartedly. This notion was summed up by Nilus' reflection on Sol 1.4: the groom was the Logos of God, who was incarnate for the salvation of the world. He had invited all souls to his wedding. But only the virtuous soul accepted his nuptial call. The other souls did not conceive the majesty of the groom's call. They were

⁶⁰ Procopius of Gaza, *Fragmenta in Cantica Cantorum*, PG 87, 1760 A. It needs to be noticed that, for Origen, soul had been called neighbour (*πλησίον*) with respect to her nearness to the groom. She was called beautiful and neighbour only when she approached near the Logos. Before that, she was called "blackened" and "tanned" by the sun. See Origen, *Hom.* 2.4.289.

⁶¹ Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.85D. Nilus, *Com.* 27.19.82.

⁶² Origen, *Com.* 2.5.136: "[the] soul that has indeed been set in the path of progress, but she has not yet attained the summit of perfection. She is called beautiful because she is advancing" [all translations by Lawson unless otherwise stated].

⁶³ Cf. Nilus, *Com.* 10. 8.32. Origen, *Com.* 3.14. 240.

remaining unconvinced of its importance. Thus, it was granted only to her, through her ethical efforts, to enter into spiritual heights and learn the divine mysteries --i.e. divine providence and the mystery of the incarnation--.⁶⁴

Was the individual soul a solitary unity advancing spiritually in inner loneliness --like the Plotinian soul--?⁶⁵ Was she detached from the maidens? The Patristic exegetes left no place for a solitary ascension of the soul to spiritual heights. The fact that Origen could interchange between the union of Logos and soul, and Christ and Church illustrates his thought that the soul always remained part of the Christian community in her ascension to the divine.⁶⁶ The Church constitutes the unity of the faithful -spiritually advanced or not- as the body of Christ.⁶⁷ The soul was always a member of this body in her spiritual ascension.⁶⁸ Thus, there was a strong bond between the bride and the other members of the Church.

Gregory of Nyssa reinforced the notion of union between bride and the community in his *Life of Moses*. In his exegesis, Moses --like the Solomonean bride- stood as an allegory for the soul: both Moses and the bride were advancing in their union to God. For Gregory, it was not accidental that Moses lived isolated in Midian (or Mount Sinai) for some time. Yet, he eventually returned to his people.⁶⁹ The time of isolation was the time of spiritual progress. Yet, this progress did not detach Moses from the community. In his return, Moses was communicating to Israel the experience of his spiritual union with God. For Gregory, there was a strong bond between the perfect soul and the uninitiated ones. This bond had acquired the

⁶⁴ Nilus, *Com.* 5.1.15. Origen, *Com.* 1.5.86.

⁶⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*. 6.9.11. K. Corrigan, 'Some Notes towards a Study of the 'Solitariness' and the 'Dark' in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius', *SP* 30 (1997), 151-157.

⁶⁶ Louth, *Origins*, 53: "Origen is talking about the life of the baptised Christian within the Church; Plato and Plotinus about the search for the ultimate truth by an intellectual elite, either in the company of other like-minded souls, or as 'the alone to the Alone'". King, *The Spirit*, 14.

⁶⁷ Origen, *Com.* 1.1.59: "[but] the Church, you must observe, is the whole assembly of the saints". See Balthasar, *Preséance*, 134: "the point of departure of religious 'metaphysics' is necessarily of an individual nature: it is an analysis of desire and the aspirations of the soul. Whatever there was of a social nature in the mysteries of the pagans was merely the expression of a gregarious instinct whose aim it was to assure the individual salvation of the members of the group. The theological fact, by way of contrast, is radically social. For if the exterior fact and the interior fact constitute one solitary history, the social character of the exterior fact (the Church) demonstrates thereby the social character, as well, of the interior fact (the Mystical Body)".

⁶⁸ Origen, *Com.* 3.13.231.

⁶⁹ Nilus, *Com.* 69.1.172. Gregory, *Moses*, 1.56 [edition in CS 1].

character of a relationship between tutor and disciple:⁷⁰ by observing her life and her spiritual achievements, the latter desired union with God.⁷¹

No commentator was as suggestive as Procopius of Gaza in this matter: he designated the soul as “διδάσκαλος” (teacher). In their turn, the uninitiated souls were called “μαθητευόμενοι” (disciples). She became their teacher and guide; they were her students; for, as the act developed, it was apparent that the bride was guiding the maidens to seek and find the groom.⁷² In her communicating with them, the bride stirred up their love, motivating them to join her to her spiritual ascension. Even at the times that she was only addressing the groom, the uninitiated souls could observe her life. They were praising her beauty/perfection and, eventually, they were longing for divine love. For Procopius of Gaza, what constituted the bond between the spiritually advanced soul and the uninitiated souls was the fact that she was contemplating the image of the groom on them.⁷³ Thus, not only did she recover the divine image within her but she also discerned the divine image within the rest of humanity.

In short, the Patristic commentators viewed the bride of the *Song of Songs* as an allegory of the Christian soul that was advancing in spiritual perfection. She was depicted in terms of perfection even though it was noted that she had not reached perfection yet. The fact remains that she responded to the groom’s call, thus advancing to spiritual life through ethical labouring.

3. Absence and presence in the *Song of Songs*.

i. The biblical background.

One of the main features of the *Song of Songs* is the fact that it introduced the theme of separation and abandonment. The imagery with regard to the relationship between bride and groom was less than ideal: the groom abandoned his bride. As Origen noted:

[The] Bridegroom, however, is to be understood as a husband who is not always in house, nor is He in perpetual attendance on the Bride, who stays in the house. Rather, He frequently goes out, and she, yearning for His love, seeks Him when He is absent; yet He Himself returns to her from time to time. It seems, therefore, that

⁷⁰ Origen, *Com.* 2.3.117. Gregory used the analogy between Paul and the bride: Paul had exhorted the faithful to become his imitators like he had become an imitator of Christ. The bride exhorted the maidens addressing them with the same words as Paul. Gregory, *Hom.* 2, 46.

⁷¹ Nilus, *Com.* 5.3.16. Origen, *Com.* 1.5.84. Procopius of Gaza, *Fragmenta*, PG 87, 1756 A.

⁷² Procopius of Gaza, *Fragmenta*, PG 87, 1757 D and 1772 B.

⁷³ Procopius of Gaza, *ibid.*, 1760 A. Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.93A and 4.197A.

all through this little book we must expect to find the Bridegroom sometimes being sought as one who is away, and sometimes speaking to the Bride as being present with her.⁷⁴

In the biblical canon, the theme of abandonment was not confined only to the content of the *Song of Songs*; nor was it a characteristic of Hebrew religious literature. Block traced the introduction of the theme in religious literature within the Sumerian and Akkadian (Assyrian-Babylonian) religious cult.⁷⁵ It was within the religious poems of the Near East that Block identified the origins of the notion of being abandoned by God. Block's presentation makes it evident that the theme was an integral part of the early religious literature of the Middle East. It had been employed as part of myths that functioned as explanations for disasters and misfortunes that had come upon the Assyrian and Babylonian nations. The myths connected divine absence to distressful conditions. Thus, it was felt that distressful conditions occurred because the local deity had abandoned its place of cultic worship. What was the cause for divine abandonment was not always clear. The myths referred to human sin several times. But that is far from making it the exclusive cause of divine abandonment. Most times, the devotee was inquiring about the inexplicable sense of abandonment. From 15 instances in ancient literature that Block discussed, human provocation appeared 8 times.⁷⁶ When it appeared, human sin and misdeeds had offended the local deity that departed, thus leaving the nation subjected to natural (e.g. flood) and also political (e.g. invasion) disasters. Whenever it did not appear, then the myth was stressing the consequences of the sudden departure of the deity. Samuel Balentine highlighted the presence of the theme in the Sumerian and Akkadian religious literature suggesting that:

In view of the parallel laments about the deity's aloofness which can be found in Sumerian-Akkadian psalms, it can no longer be assumed that this was a problem

⁷⁴ Origen, *Com.* 3.13.230.

⁷⁵ D. I. Block, 'Divine Abandonment: Ezekiel's Adaptation of an Ancient Near East Motif', in Odell and Strong (eds.), *Ezekiel*, 16-17. For Block, the development of the theme of divine abandonment in the prophecies of Ezekiel was influenced by the religious and political interaction of Israel with nations that had already developed a notion of divine desolation in their religious literature. Block highlighted the fact that Ezekiel adapted the theme appropriating it according to the monotheistic character of the Israelite religion. Before Block, Balentine had already discussed the presence of the theme in the Near East of antiquity indicating that the motif of divine abandonment had also addressed the relation between the divine and the individual. See S. E. Balentine, 'The Historical Background', in *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament*, OThM (Oxford: OUP, 1983), 22-44. J. F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, Biblical Judaic Studies 7 (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

⁷⁶ Block provided a list with regard to the motif including among other issues: i) the genre in which the theme has appeared; ii) the cause (human provocation); iii) the motive (divine anger); iv) the effect (disaster); and v) deity's altered disposition. For the list see Block, 'Divine Abandonment', 32-33.

which Israel confronted for the first time in the sixth century BC. Instead it is best to see Israel's laments as having taken up a motif that was probably quite common in the lament *Gattungen* of the Near East.⁷⁷

Block researched the way in which Israel developed the notion of divine abandonment in its cultural and religious interaction with the nations of the Near East. As he noted:

In tracing the history of the motif we may recognise five specific dimensions of Yahweh's abandonment contemplated in the Old Testament: (1) Yahweh's absence from an individual, devotee or otherwise; (2) Yahweh's absence from his people, the nation of Israel; (3) Yahweh's absence from the land of Israel; (4) Yahweh's absence from Jerusalem/Zion; (5) Yahweh's absence from his sanctuary.⁷⁸

Whereas Block discussed the notion of divine abandonment exclusively in terms of God's relation with the nation of Israel and the place of cultic worship, in his *Hidden God*, Balentine shed more light on the presence of the theme in the religious literature of Israel, thus focusing on the personal relationship between God and his devotee. Thus, he examined the various meanings that the concept communicated in *Psalms*, the Wisdom literature (*Ecclesiastes-Job*) and also the prophets.

According to Balentine, the Old Testament transmitted the theme of divine abandonment primarily in terms of God's "turning away his face" from the individual.⁷⁹ In developing the theme, Hebrew religious literature paid attention to the fact that the relationship between God and his devotee was not always harmonious; nor was God bound to his promise to stand by the side of his devotee. For Balentine, the theme of God's "turning away his face" was synonymous with divine abandonment.

The most indicative examples of Hebrew literature where the theme was introduced were the *Psalms* of lamentation: the devotee questioned God as to why he

⁷⁷ Balentine, *Hidden God*, 170. The sixth century BC is of particular significance since it corresponds to the Babylonian invasion and exile. According to Balentine and Block, Ezekiel appropriated the notion of divine absence in order to interpret Israel's exile to Babylon.

⁷⁸ Block: 'Divine Abandonment', 16-17. Block did not intend to discuss the first dimension of divine abandonment (individual/devotee), since he focused on the prophetic understanding of divine abandonment (*Ezekiel*). However, certain assessments could be used in order to help us understand the place that the theme had held in Middle East religions of antiquity.

⁷⁹ Balentine traced this position already in the Sumerian and Akkadian literature. Balentine, *Hidden God*, 24. Balentine discussed the combination of the words סָתַר (to hide) and פָּנִים (face) as indications of God's turning away his face. The latter term became synonymous to divine abandonment. However, Balentine did not engage in an examination of the verb עָזַב (to abandon) in the Old Testament. It was Block that researched on the various linguistic forms of the verb. His examination, nevertheless, was limited to the appearance of the theme in the book of *Ezekiel*. See Block, 'Divine Abandonment', 16-17 [footnotes nos. 6-7].

had abandoned him (“why?”);⁸⁰ or he inquired about the duration of the experience (“how long?”).⁸¹ Alongside the inquisition, there developed another form of lamentation psalm which included a petition that God should not abandon his devotee (“abandon me not/hide not your face”).⁸² Balentine drew his reader’s attention to the fact that the cause of divine abandonment was not always clear. The psalmist’s inquiry about the cause and also the fact that he protested about his innocence demonstrate the inexplicable character of the experience.⁸³ Balentine challenged the position that advocates the presence of sin, even when there was no explicit reference to the latter.⁸⁴ It is true that, in the prophetic books, sin was always the cause of abandonment.⁸⁵ However, as Balentine put it:

In the laments which feature the phrase ‘hide the face’ several factors work against the theory that the suppliant perceives sin to be the cause of his dilemma... what is lacking in these particular psalms is not merely information about the specifics of the transgression; it is rather information that would indicate that sin is involved at any level at all.⁸⁶

Thus, Balentine suggested a dissociation between the theme of divine abandonment and the concept of divine punishment. The two motifs seem inseparable only in the prophetic books. But for the psalmist of the lamentation psalms, the cause was hidden from him. Thus, divine abandonment was felt to be the hiding of God’s face, where God had hidden his works from man. What we need to highlight is the fact that the Hebrew religious literature as portrayed in *Psalms* dealt with the cause of abandonment as a mystery that had troubled the heart of the devotee.

Balentine also examined the consequences of divine abandonment. He indicated that the theme of abandonment and its consequences went side by side in the Old Testament: it is as a result of the consequences that the devotee realised that

⁸⁰ Ps 21:2; 43:24; 87:15 [References to the *Psalms* are according to the Greek numbering which combines the Hebrew Ps 9 & 10, and separates the Hebrew Ps 147 into two].

⁸¹ Ps 13:2. Both forms of inquiry were of Sumerian origin. See: Balentine, *Hidden God*, 26ff.

⁸² Ps 9:32; 37:22; 27:9. Balentine, *ibid*, 50-51.

⁸³ See: Balentine, ‘The Significance of the Motif for Old Testament Theology’, in *ibid*, 164-176.

⁸⁴ Due to the fact that the psalms were thought to be models of prayer for the community, scholars have supported the idea that any reference to specific sin would have limited the use of the psalm to a specific ethical context. The book of *Psalms* maintained an ambiguity about the specific sin that had resulted in divine abandonment so that their content could have found a broader use according to individual needs. Fr. Nötscher, *Das Angesicht Gottes Schauen’ nach Biblischer und Babylonischer Auffassung* (Auflage: Würzburg, 1924). S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Towards a New Biblical Theology* (New York NY: Harper & Row, 1978). See also, Balentine, *Hidden God*, 52 [footnotes nos. 13 and 17].

⁸⁵ For Balentine, the reason for the connection between divine abandonment and sin in the prophets needs to be sought in the conditions of the exile, where the prophets appropriated the themes of divine abandonment and punishment to explain Israel’s Babylonian captivity. Balentine, *ibid*, 76.

⁸⁶ Balentine, *ibid*, 53.

he was abandoned by God. This fact suggests that abandonment had consequences. Balentine classified the consequences into three categories: i) separation between God and man; ii) separation between God and place of cultic worship; and iii) confinement to Sheol.⁸⁷ Here, we will briefly examine the first and the last motifs. As it concerns the first point, divine abandonment resulted in cutting off the communication between God and man. God has not listened to the prayers of the individual. He has left him prey to his attacking enemies. The psalmist employed the verbs “to hear”-“see”-“answer” in order to encompass all modes of divine activity.⁸⁸ God did not intervene in the supplication of his devotee. This separation of communication was expressed with the vivid description of man’s descent to the pit or the grave, i.e. Sheol:

For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draws into the grave. I am counted with them that go down into Sheol: I am as a man that has no strength,⁸⁹

[and] you have brought me into the dust of death,⁹⁰

[when] you are silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.⁹¹

The fact that the individual was confined to Sheol demonstrates the connection between divine absence and death. God is the source of life and everything that is good in humanity.⁹² He is the strength of one’s life.⁹³ When the individual felt separated from God, his strength withdrew and he reached the face of death. The *Psalms* touch upon the theme of man’s dependence on God. It is only when God has looked upon his devotee that he has felt divine protection. But, when God has turned away his face, the individual has felt abandoned and thus, he/she has reached Sheol.⁹⁴ Divine abandonment was felt in terms of separation between man and God. Such separation put under jeopardy also man’s life. Without divine protection, the individual felt the absence of life, i.e. Sheol, “the land of forgetfulness”.⁹⁵ As a final remark it needs to be noticed that, as Block remarked, even though God had warned

⁸⁷ Balentine, *ibid*, 56-57.

⁸⁸ Balentine, *ibid*, 57.

⁸⁹ Ps 87: 4.

⁹⁰ Ps 21:16.

⁹¹ Ps 27:1.

⁹² 1Kgs 20:3.

⁹³ Ps 17:2; 24.1; 60:4.

⁹⁴ Ps 103:28-30.

⁹⁵ J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, vol. 2 (London: OUP, 1926), 462. For the meaning of Sheol see, Ph. S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

that he might turn his face away from the sinner, the Old Testament never affirmed that God ever actually realised his threat.⁹⁶ It was the individual that felt his separation from God. Yet, God never explicitly declared that he abandoned his people. The prophetic books marked a shifting point in religious literature: divine abandonment was part of God's plan that resulted in divine restoration. Thus, the pessimistic tone of the *Psalms* was complemented with the concept of God's return. As Balentine wrote:

With the end of the period of captivity, the prophets speak of an end to the period of God's hiding and of the promise of future deliverance. Thus, the ultimate consequence of God's hiding is not separation, which is the implication in the psalms of lament, but restoration.⁹⁷

ii. Abandonment of the soul: perfection and sin.

The *Song of Songs* was composed in the form of a drama. Its content unfolded through monologues, dialogues, and narrative. The drama was full of romantic words and sensual imagery illustrating the love between bride and groom. Nevertheless, as it was noted, their relationship was less than idyllic. The introduction of the theme of abandonment to the drama juxtaposed times of union between the two lovers and times of separation. The groom twice abandoned his bride. The latter felt his absence and she sought him at the city-market.⁹⁸ Rather than presenting a romantic search for the beloved, the compiler of the *Song* emphasised her distress: the bride was wounded by the city's watchmen who removed her garment.⁹⁹ Though in Sol 3:4 the groom dissolved her despair immediately, in Sol 5:6 he prolonged the soul's despair. Before we move to an analysis of Byzantine exegesis on the episodes of the *Song of Songs* we need to make the following observations:

i) The *Song* has introduced the theme of abandonment. It seems that, originally, the *Song of Songs* was a love-poem describing the sudden departure of the beloved; thus, stressing his lover's despair. At first sight, the *Song* was missing the petition or inquiry of the lamentation psalms: the bride did not address an inquiry about his departure. This is true in terms of addressing the groom himself. But the

⁹⁶ Block, 'Divine Abandonment', 17.

⁹⁷ Balentine, *Hidden God*, 76.

⁹⁸ Sol 3:1: "I sought him (whom my soul loveth) but I found him not"; Sol 5:6: "My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone... I sought him but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer". For a textual analysis of the two episodes, see Hess, 'Lovers Joined and Separated', in *Song of Songs*, 101-108. Idem, 'Search and Union', in *ibid*, 160-192.

⁹⁹ Sol 5:7: "The watchmen that go their rounds in the city found me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me".

biblical bride had asked the watchmen: “Have you seen him whom my soul loves”? The question, as such, did not resemble the usual questions (why? how long?) that we encountered in Hebrew and non-Hebrew religious literature. However, behind the lines of union and separation in the *Song*, rabbis and Christian commentators might have discerned a theme quite favoured in religious poetry: divine abandonment. The fact that, right from the beginning, the *Song of Songs* was valued as an authentic religious poem -as opposed to a mere love song- could not be dissociated from the fact that at its heart lay the theme of love and also abandonment and separation. If its content was felt to be of one accord with the biblical canon, then its theme of divine abandonment must have been felt to share the same notion of abandonment with the other books of religious value.

ii) We find no explanation of the sudden departure of the groom in the first episode.¹⁰⁰ The *Song* provided no leads about what forced the groom to depart from his bride. In the second episode, the delay of his lover to open the door seems to cause his departure.¹⁰¹ But the groom never uttered any causes for his behaviour. It is also true that the bride did not ponder on the matter. Undeniably, she felt his absence without ever thinking about the cause of his departure. The fact that no causes were mentioned might be the reason why the rabbis felt that the *Song* was in conformity with the rest of religious literature. As is the case of the lamentation psalms, the *Song* maintained the same obscurity about the causes of divine abandonment.

a. Origen: perfection and trials

We will now discuss the presence of the theme of divine abandonment in the Byzantine exegesis of the *Song*, relating our examination to the notion of sin. We will start with Origen, the author who set the exegetical agenda for later commentators on the *Song*.

The theme of abandonment in the *Song of Songs* was spotted by Origen. But, according to him, it was not only in the episodes at Sol 3:1 and 5:6 that the motif was introduced. Origen established his exegesis on the dialectical form of presence and absence throughout the work. In a passage quoted earlier, Origen observed:

¹⁰⁰ Sol 3:1ff.

¹⁰¹ Sol 5:3: “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?”

[The] Bridegroom, however, is to be understood as a husband who is not always in house, nor is He in perpetual attendance on the Bride, who stays in the house. Rather, He frequently goes out, and she, yearning for His love, seeks Him when He is absent; yet He Himself returns to her from time to time. It seems, therefore, that all through this little book we must expect to find the Bridegroom sometimes being sought as one who is away, and sometimes speaking to the Bride as being present with her.¹⁰²

It was the form of the narrative that made Origen emphasise the tension between presence and hiddenness in his exegesis. But, for Origen, the image of union and separation needed to find an interpretation that could manifest its meaning for the text. The opening scene –the bride’s plea– had anticipated the coming of the groom. Origen remarked that the scene was the soul’s prayer to the Father asking for the coming of the Logos. Origen presented a paradox: whereas the soul had anticipated the coming of the groom, the latter was already present:

[While she is thus praying] the Bridegroom was present and standing by her as she prayed... The Bride having seen that He, for whose coming she was praying, was already present, and that even when she spoke He offered her the things she asked.¹⁰³

Origen introduced the interchange between presence and absence as an historical reality: the bride had already received the gifts of the groom, i.e. the Law and the Prophets. Origen had no doubt that the Law and the Prophets had manifested God’s presence within history. And yet, the bride remained in anticipation of his coming.¹⁰⁴ The theme of love that was the soul’s wound also led him to the direction of attesting the divine presence within the soul. As it was argued, in fact, it was the divine image that the soul had recovered within, that illustrated the intimacy between bride and groom. Yet the paradox remained: the bride was anticipating the coming of the groom. The groom’s leaping off the mountains and bounding over the hills¹⁰⁵ and the groom’s voice were indications of his immanence. Yet, the fact that he was hiding behind the walls and also that he communicated with his bride only through enigmas attested his hiddenness.

This tension between divine presence and hiddenness was not unknown to the rabbinic interpretation that was contemporary to Origen’s exegesis. The Talmudic tradition had also highlighted divine presence and absence in the light of Israel’s history. The *Song of Songs* was felt to demonstrate the historical ascension of Israel from Egypt to its eschatological completion. God had manifested his presence in

¹⁰² Origen, *Com.* 3.13.230.

¹⁰³ Origen, *Com.* 1.2.63 and *Com.* 3.11.210: “the Bridegroom is thus sometimes present and teaching, and sometimes He is said to be absent; and then He is desired”.

¹⁰⁴ Origen, *Com.* 1.1.58-59.

¹⁰⁵ Sol 2:8.

Sinai where he revealed his Law to Israel. It was the time of intimacy when God communicated his “innermost secrets” to Israel.¹⁰⁶ Yet, Israel felt God’s abandonment in the desert and her exile (Babylon). The night of the bride in Sol 3:1 was the period when God did not speak to Moses. It was the time of God’s silence:

Rashi explains night as referring to the torment of Israel’s darkness when they were under the ‘Ban’ [incurred because of the sins of the Spies who turned the people against the land. During this period, the *Midrash* (2:11) explains, God did not speak with Moses]... According to *Alsichich*, the verse refers to the dark ‘nights’ of the Egyptian and Babylonian exiles when Israel sought out their God to redeem them and resume His love for them. [The imagery is poignant. It depicts the anguish of a tormented, insomniac Israel –bereft of its former open, uninhibited relationship with God- figuratively twisting and turning sleeplessly during its period of most pronounced separation, longing after Him, and a resumption of His love].¹⁰⁷

The *Targum* interpreted Sol 5:6 as the soul’s prayer to God. However, God remained silent forsaking her: “I called Him but He did not answer me, i.e. I prayed but He did not respond”.¹⁰⁸ Such a prayer stressed Israel’s despair. God became intimate and hidden within the history of Israel. This interpretation was based on the development of the theme of divine abandonment in the prophetic circles of Israel: it was Israel’s sin that led God to abandon his people. Thus, the tension between presence and absence was established on Israel’s ethical purification.¹⁰⁹ Israel’s actions urged God’s reaction.

However, even Hellenism seems to have developed a vague notion of union and separation (hiddenness) that never took real form before the work of Philo and Plotinus. As Louth remarked, Origen employed the Platonic language of a *sudden* appearance of the groom.¹¹⁰ Unlike Plato, Origen also taught of a sudden separation

¹⁰⁶ Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Shir Hashirim*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, 116.

¹⁰⁸ Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Shir Hashirim*, 150.

¹⁰⁹ See, Block, ‘Divine Abandonment’.

¹¹⁰ Orig. *Hom.* 1.7.280. Cf. Plato, *Epistula* 7, 341d: “ῥητόν γάρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστὶν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα, ἀλλ’ ἐκ πολλῆς συνουσίας γιγνομένης περὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ συζῆν ἐξαίφνης, οἷον ἀπὸ πυρός πηδῆσαντος ἐξαφθὲν φῶς, ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γενόμενον αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἤδη τρέφει” (for a thing of this kind cannot be expressed by words like other disciplines, but by a long familiarity, and living in conjunction with the thing itself, a light as it were leaping from a fire will on a sudden be enkindled in the soul, and there itself nourish itself). Idem, *Respublica*, 515c4. Idem, *Symposium*, 210.e.2: “[ὁς] γὰρ ἂν μέχρι ἐνταῦθα πρὸς τὰ ἐρωτικά παιδαγωγηθῆ, θεώμενος ἐφεξῆς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς τὰ καλὰ, πρὸς τέλος ἤδη ἰὼν τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ἐξαίφνης κατόνεται τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσιν καλόν, τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο, ὃ Σώκρατες, οὐ δὴ ἔνεκεν καὶ οἱ ἐμπροσθεν πάντες πόνοι ἦσαν” (whoever then is advanced thus far in the mysteries of Love by a right and regular progress of contemplation, approaching new to perfect intuition, suddenly he will discover, bursting into view, a beauty astonishingly admirable; that very beauty, to the gaining a sight of which the aim of all his preceding studies and labours had been directed) [trans. Taylor]. See also, Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.3.17; 5.5.7ff and 6.7.34. Philo, *Quod Deus est Immutabilis*, 93.1ff: “ὅταν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς παραδιδῶ τὰ τῆς αἰδίου σοφίας θεωρήματα καμάτου χωρὶς καὶ πόνου, ταῦτα ἐξαίφνης οὐ προσδοκῆσαντες θησαυρὸν εὐδαιμονίας τελείας ἐβρίσκομεν” (when God delivers to us the lore of His eternal wisdom without our toil or

between bride and groom. McGinn argued that the concept of a sudden apparition of the divine in Plato put under question the notion of an “impersonal” auto-salvation in classical philosophy. For McGinn, the sudden manifestation of the divine was a sort of “divine interference” that resulted in the soul’s awakening.¹¹¹ Like the development of the theme of divine abandonment in the prophetic circles of late Judaism, the Hellenic classical heritage had also introduced a sudden separation between the human and divine that was not caused by sin. Origen’s contemporary, Plotinus, wrote about a sudden apparition and also about a sudden falling from the vision.¹¹² McGinn implied a connection between Plotinus’ thought and the notion of *paideia*. In examining Plotinus’ thought, McGinn discerned three stages in spiritual life: i) preparation; ii) union; and iii) return. At the stage of preparation, subject and object (i.e. soul and Intellect) were distinct. When union was achieved, soul and Intellect were indistinguishable. The stage of return was a sort of separation where soul and Intellect were becoming distinct again.¹¹³ According to McGinn, for Plotinus the stages of union and separation were repetitive and complemented each other. The stage of separation signified the soul’s return to discursive reason. As soon as the soul had turned to the latter, then the distinction between soul and Intellect was introduced again. The soul’s return did not occur due to any sin or incompetence. McGinn argued that, for Plotinus, the stage of preparation has been a feature of this present life. Despite the fact that Hellenism never really developed an idea of eschatology, it is the case that Plotinus postponed the soul’s journey to the divine after leaving the body.¹¹⁴ The soul could not achieve full union with the divine Intellect in this life. Thus, the stages of preparation, union and return have been features of this life. In this way, Plotinus introduced an eschatological

labour we find in it suddenly and unexpectedly a treasure of perfect happiness) [trans. Colson and Whitaker]. Idem, *De Praemiis et Poenis*, 37-51. For a discussion on the motif of soul’s sudden union with God in Plato and Plotinus see Louth, ‘Plato’, in *Origins*, 1-17. Also, McGinn, *Foundations*, 30ff and 53ff.

¹¹¹ McGinn, *Foundations*, 30. See also, Louth, *Origins*, 13. A. J. Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1936).

¹¹² Plotinus, *Enneads*, 6.9.11: “Ἐκκίπτων δὲ τῆς θεας πάλιν ἐγείρας ἀρετὴν” (when one falls from the vision, he wakes again the virtue in himself) [trans. Armstrong].

¹¹³ McGinn, *Foundations*, 44ff.

¹¹⁴ A theme that had already appeared in Plato’s dialogues, especially *Phaedo*. Cf. D. Melling, ‘Preparing the Soul for Death: the *Phaedo*’, in *Understanding Plato*, OPUS (Oxford: OUP, 1987) 64-74.

perspective in his thought: the soul was meant to surpass the stage of separation at a future point.¹¹⁵

In Philo, the theme of hiddenness was introduced in the context of understanding the scriptures. It is in this author that the theme acquired its dialectical form: divine presence went alongside divine absence. For Philo, it was the Logos as divine Wisdom that has dwelled within the scriptures. Yet, this Wisdom sometimes illuminated him by directing his intellect to divine knowledge. At other times, it abandoned him, when the meaning of words was impenetrable and Philo would give up his philosophical pursuits. In a lengthy passage Philo exposed his own experience:

I feel no shame in recording my own experience, a thing I know from its happening to me a thousand times. On some occasions, after making up my mind to follow the usual course of writing on philosophical tenets, and knowing definitely the substance of what I was to set down, I have found my understanding incapable of giving birth to a single idea, and have given it up without accomplishing anything, reviling my understanding for its self-conceit, and filled with amazement at the might of Him that is to Whom is due the opening and closing of the soul-wombs. On the other occasions, I have approached my work empty and suddenly become full, the ideas falling in a shower from above and being sown invisibly, so that under the influence of the Divine possession I have been filled with corybantic frenzy and been unconscious of anything, place, persons present, myself, words spoken, lines written.¹¹⁶

Again, it needs to be noticed that, there was no reference to sin nor, in fact, any other cause for this hiddenness. This is not the only place in which Philo introduced the theme of a sudden apparition. Yet, this is the only place that Philo emphasised in all vigour the dialectical form of presence and absence.

In Origen, the theme of divine abandonment occurred in the same context as in Philo. In the same fashion, Origen reported on his own experience while commenting on the *Song of Songs*:

God is my witness that I have often perceived the Bridegroom drawing near me and being most intensely present with me; then suddenly he has withdrawn and I could not find him, though I sought to do so. Then when he has appeared and I lay hold of him, he slips away once more. And when he has so slipped away my search for him begins anew.¹¹⁷

Was it mystical experience or biblical impenetrability that Origen felt? As Louth observed, it is difficult to distinguish between mystical experience and biblical interpretation in Origen's thought. In Plotinus' case, the soul flew to the divine. In Origen, such a flight could not become dissociated from the manifestation of the

¹¹⁵ See D. O'Meara: 'À propos d'un témoignage sur l'expérience mystique de Plotin', *Mnemosyne* 27 (1974), 238-244.

¹¹⁶ Philo, *De Migratione Abrahamis*, 34 [trans. Colson and Whitaker].

¹¹⁷ Origen, *Hom.* 1.7.280.

Logos within the scriptures. In other words, Plotinus had emphasised the soul's preparation for her spiritual journey. Origen highlighted illumination that originates from the Logos. In Plotinus, the device of sudden union was meant to introduce the notion that the soul could achieve a union that was beyond her understanding.¹¹⁸ In Origen, the divine Logos was at the very heart of union and --what is more important for us-- separation. Origen provided a "personalistic" interpretation of spiritual life where the Logos was the person calling for the soul.¹¹⁹ He was also the person that, suddenly, separated from the soul. But, such "personalistic" argument had begun with the Logos' manifestation within the scriptures, i.e. the *locus* of his revelation. Origen did not separate between mystical experience and the manifestation of the Logos in scripture.¹²⁰ In a passage, reminiscent of the Philonic account, Origen wrote:

When she [the soul] is trying to understand something and desiring to know some obscure and secret matters, as long as she cannot find what she is looking for, the Word of God is surely absent from her. But when the thing she sought comes up to meet her, and appears to her, who doubts but that the Word of God is present, illuminating her mind and offering to her the light of knowledge? And again we perceive He is withdrawn from us and comes again, in every matter that is either opened or closed to our understanding.¹²¹

There is no doubt that, as Louth put it, for Origen,

these passages have a spectrum of meaning that ranges from the sort of thing I have mentioned [i.e. engagement with Scriptures] to something which is genuinely mystical experience of God.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Louth, *Origins*, 14. According to Meredith, Plato had suggested divine incomprehensibility and Plotinus had touched upon the theme of divine infinity. See A. Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1999), 13-14. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 28c: "τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός εἰρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εἰρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν". Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.5.6: "γελοῖον γὰρ ζητεῖν ἐκείνην τὴν ἀπλετον φύσιν περιλαμβάνειν" (it would be absurd to seek and comprehend that boundless nature) [trans. Armstrong]. Also in *Enneads*, 6.9.6: "Ληπτέον δὲ καὶ ἀπειρον αὐτὸν οὐ τῷ ἀδιεξιτήτῳ ἢ τοῦ μεγέθους ἢ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἀπεριλήπτῳ τῆς δυνάμεως" (and it must be understood as infinite not because its size and number cannot be measured or counted but because its power cannot be comprehended) [trans. Armstrong].

¹¹⁹ King, *The Spirit*, 15.

¹²⁰ Louth, *Origins*, 70. Also King, *The Spirit*, 16: "True, Origen is describing an experience of textual interpretation here [Origen, *Hom.* 1.7.279-280]. Yet, it is only an impoverished attitude towards texts and their reading that could construe the hermeneutical process as necessarily counter- or sub-effective. In Origen, allegory and mystical experience converge in a unitary symbolic language, which expresses the *contemplatio stuporis* or *ἐκστασις* that accompanies the exegete's penetration of --and by!- the meaning of the text".

¹²¹ Origen, *Com.* 3.11.210-211. Cf. Philo, *De Migratione Abrahamis*, 38: "Hereby comes to pass even the seeing of the Divine light, identical with knowledge, which opens wide the soul's eyes, and leads it to apprehension distinct and brilliant beyond those gained by the ears". Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragments in Cantica Canticorum*, PG. 69, 1284.

¹²² Louth, *Origins*, 71.

Thus, the theme of abandonment was realised in terms of the Logos' presence within the scriptures and also, the soul's preparation to engage with the scriptures in order to discern the manifestation of the Logos in them.

Yet, an overemphasis on the biblical foundation of Origen's mysticism could miss the point that Origen related divine dereliction to ethical trials and tribulations. Without referring to the presence of sin, Origen related divine abandonment to trials: "[the] fact that emerges is that he appears to his bride all through the winter –that is to say, in the time of tribulations and trials".¹²³ Origen related the time of tribulations and trials as part of the soul's spiritual journey. Since the winter was the time of trials, it is important to note that the presence of the groom was manifested in the middle of the winter. For Origen, that is to say that the Logos has appeared to his bride in a secret way at the time of tribulations. Reflecting on the episodes of the *Song*, Origen distinguished between the voice of the groom and his presence. His voice was a manifestation of his presence. Yet, it was not the same mode of revelation as his true presence. The fact that the bride had discerned the groom's voice in the middle of the winter provided Origen with the imagery to argue that it was within tribulations that the Logos made his presence manifest. What kind of tribulations did Origen have in mind? We only have leads based on his exegesis on the *Song*. Origen employed the same analogy between winter and tribulation in his *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* to argue that the Logos had reinforced his devotee at times of persecutions. In his exegesis on the *Song of Songs* Origen connected the winter-time to the Church's tribulations and, subsequently, to the soul's trials.¹²⁴ On the other hand, Origen wrote:

That visitation, however, whereby she is visited for a while and then left, in order that she may be tested, and then sought again, so that her head may be upheld and she be wholly embraced, lest she either waver in faith or be weighed down in body by the load of her trials, is different.¹²⁵

Here, two points need to be noted: i) the passage appeared within the context of faith: the tribulations referred to the soul's establishment on faith. Origen's reference to bodily trials needs to be seen in the context of faith and also in the light of our earlier observation¹²⁶; ii) Origen introduced the motif of divine "visitations" in his exegesis on the *Song*. The term was suggestive of the temporary nature of divine

¹²³ Origen, *Com.* 3.11.212.

¹²⁴ Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragmenta in Cantica*, PG 69, 1284.

¹²⁵ Origen, *Com.* 3.11.212.

¹²⁶ i.e. that there is a connection between ethical trials and historical (ecclesiastical) persecutions.

presence and absence.¹²⁷ Divine manifestation was only a visitation. In other words, it was limited in its duration. Origen concluded within the term the imagery of the *Song*: the groom had visited and then abandoned the bride. Thus, Origen related the imagery to his theological agenda: the Logos' manifestation was understood in terms of divine visitations. As it will be discussed later, the term acquired eschatological connotations in his work.

With regard to the first point, the absence of any reference to sin in connection to divine abandonment needs to be examined. It was noted that the bride was an image of perfection for Origen. Despite the fact that the soul was advancing in spiritual life, Origen praised the soul's perfection encouraged by the praises that the *Song* had addressed to her. The fact that sin was addressed only in terms of the soul's past life was suggestive of Origen's position that sin was not immediately involved in the soul's spiritual ascension; as opposed to his position in *De Principiis*, where Origen clearly associated divine abandonment with sin. In this latter case, it was due to sin that God had abandoned the soul to trials and tribulations.¹²⁸ However, he associated trials and tribulations only with divine *paideia* which he reserved for souls that have followed after God's commandments. Thus, in his *De Principiis*, Origen had suggested that trials and tribulations were parts of God's providence for the spiritually mature: in her ascension to the divine, the soul moved from the stage of chastisement to perfection. At the stage of perfection, the soul remained subjected to trials and tribulations as part of divine *paideia*.¹²⁹

Origen related the soul's subjection to trials to the concept of divine "testing".¹³⁰ We need to view this position in the general context of asserting the soul's potential backsliding. Origen did not deny that, even though the soul has

¹²⁷ Origen, *op. cit.*: "that visitation, however, whereby she is visited for a little while and then left, in order that she may be tested, and then sought again... lest she either waver in faith or be weighted down in body by the load of her trials". Origen distinguished between visitations in the soul's trials and visitations to provide spiritual insights. The one reinforced the soul; the other led her upwards.

¹²⁸ Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.12-13.

¹²⁹ Lilla highlighted the accommodation of the classical ideal of instruction (*paideia*) by Clement. Ethical perfection was a combination of i) human natural tendency to virtue (*ἔθος-φύσις*); and, ii) [divine] instruction (*παιδεία-ἄσκησις-μάθησις*). See: S. R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*, OxThM (London, OUP, 1971).

¹³⁰ The Talmud had introduced divine dereliction by means of training/exercising God's people, Israel. "Divrei Yedidiah interprets... when you recognise God's greatness testify that I realise that the cause of suffering is not due to inability on His part to rescue me, or because He has decided to cast me off, never return to me. I am fully aware that my travail is because, *I am sick by virtue of His love for me*: His chastisements are chastisements of love, designed to awake me and bring me to repentance". Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Shir Hashirim*, 154.

turned from ignorance to faith, she might return to her previous ignorance.¹³¹ In accommodating the classic motto ‘know thyself’ Origen emphasised the soul’s turn from ignorance to knowledge (faith).¹³² But he also implied knowledge about the soul’s previous status before descending into a material body:

We should think that, having been created some time earlier, it comes for some reason to assume a body. And, if it is believed to be thus drawn into the body for some cause, then the work of knowledge is to determine what that cause may be.¹³³

It is easy to discern Origen’s speculative cosmology and anthropology behind his exegetical exposition: the soul fell from her divine contemplation to the condition of acquiring a material body due to a primordial weakness. Otis identified this weakness as *satiety* (κόρος).¹³⁴ Yet, in *De Principiis* and, most importantly, his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, the term that appeared is *slothfulness*.¹³⁵ Origen indicated that, through abandonment, God has tested the soul thus, exercising her against *slothfulness*. Origen viewed the soul’s initial satiety as her tendency to ethical laxity. By introducing the soul’s descent to the present material body, Origen highlighted the soul’s tendency to laxity, meaning that it is by this descent God has tested the soul and enabled her to work against such laxity. Divine abandonment — as a device— has instructed the soul against slothfulness, not so much in terms of returning to laxity as in terms of exercising her spiritual vigilance.

Due to the theological bond between his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, and also given the fact that Origen composed both works at times of religious persecution, it seems that Origen understood this “return” in terms of the soul’s return to idolatry.¹³⁶ Thus, it is not discernible whether Origen had addressed a “mystical” return of the soul to inner slothfulness —with regard to the soul’s turning away from divine contemplation— or her religious turning from faith to idolatry.¹³⁷ It seems that, for Origen, the two positions went side by side. What we need to keep in mind is the fact that, for Origen, sin always remained

¹³¹ Origen, *Com.* 2.5.138.

¹³² Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*, 1.40. Clemens, *Stromata*, 1.14.60.3. Origen, *Com.* 2.5.128.

¹³³ Origen, *Com.* 2.5.135. Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 2.9.2.

¹³⁴ B. Otis, ‘The Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System’, *DOP* 12 (1958), 102.

¹³⁵ Origen, *Princ.* 1.6.2.

¹³⁶ It is difficult to distinguish between the notion of the soul’s progress in faith and her ethical progress. In Origen the one motif presupposed the other.

¹³⁷ Origen, *Com.* 2.3.117: “after she (i.e.the soul) has turned to God and come to faith, undoubtedly experiences conflicts of thoughts and assaults of evil spirits, which strive to call her back to the attractions of her former life and the errors of unbelief”.

a possibility. In her ascension to the divine, the soul was exercised against a future lapsing. However, the presence of trials and tribulations was an indication that the soul had approached perfection. *Paideia* was not a matter of chastising her sin any more: divine abandonment was a spiritual device through which Origen illustrated the soul's ascension to perfection through divine instruction.

It was commented that, whereas Louth pointed to Origen's positive exegetical positions, Otis highlighted the negative aspects of Origenist thought. This is due to the implications of introducing the soul's potential backsliding: Louth treated the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* as the soul's 'spiritual journey' to the divine. He noted that the stage of divine abandonment was only a temporary device that was meant to be overcome by the final union with God.¹³⁸ On the opposite side, Otis illustrated Origenist exegesis as the soul's 'return' to the divine. Thus, the introduction of the soul's primordial lapse by Otis diminished Origen's optimism that Louth supported. Otis seems to have ignored the notion of divine instruction as part of the classical ethical system employed by Clement and inherited by Origen, presenting the complementarity between *nature* and *paideia*.

Louth supported the idea that, for Origen, the end of spiritual life was divine contemplation. This contemplation passed through times of darkness. Origen's point was that knowledge of the divine seems to surpass human conception. Thus, the theme of abandonment was another way for Origen to argue the relationship between the majesty of divine nature and the soul's limited perceptive capacity. However, Origen did not address God as totally unknowable: his union with the soul will be complete.¹³⁹ But when?

To answer the question we need to take into account one last aspect of Origenist exegesis on the *Song*. This is the notion of time which Cheek has aptly called as *Heilsgeschichte* in Origen. Cheek argued that what lays behind Origenist exegesis on the *Song of Songs* is the Christian message of an eschatological completion.¹⁴⁰ The interplay between divine presence and absence needs to be seen in terms of God's leading human history to its completion, towards an *eschaton*.

¹³⁸ Louth, *Origins*, 71-72.

¹³⁹ Louth, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁰ Cheek illustrated the Jewish foundation of the theme. Thus, Origen was not a mere adherent of classical Hellenic philosophy. He was also an exegete that was moving within the theological context that the Old Testament had already outlined. See J. E. Cheek, *Eschatology and Redemption in the Theology of Origen: Israelite-Jewish and Greek-Hellenistic Ideas in Origen's Interpretation of Redemption* (PhD Thesis: Drew University, 1962).

Origen introduced the progressive revelation of Christ to the soul: the bride was introduced progressively to the fragrance of wine, then the sweetness, and then the taste of it. In the same fashion, the perfect soul was introduced to spiritual mysteries through various stages. Origen left the completion of the soul's initiation to divine mysteries open. He only implied the Eucharistic completion "on the festal day in the heavenly places, when the great feast is set".¹⁴¹ As in the rabbinic interpretation, the love between bride and groom was understood to remain unconsummated. For Origen, the soul was granted insights into the divine mysteries. Yet, Origen maintained an open horizon with regard to the time when the enigmas and the veils would disappear and the soul would contemplate God face to face. His position suggested an eschatological dimension that illustrated the progressive, yet unconsummated, revelation from God. The theme of abandonment addressed the presence of God within history through theophanies and revelations. The incarnation meant a new era for the soul where she discerned God's intervention for her redemption. The incarnation also illustrated the true divine presence. After the incarnation the soul realised that the theophanies and prophecies of old were but types of his presence. Yet, notwithstanding the centrality of the incarnation to Origen, Christ's incarnation was another stage of divine revelation that would lead to the final union between God and man:

The redemptive work of God has been fulfilled in the incarnation and man is already redeemed. But the plan waits to be consummated in the future at the end of time; man does not yet fully participate in the blessings of redemption. The redemptive blessings, however, can be participated in by anticipation through the relationship which the believer establishes with the Incarnate Word; through his sharing in the gifts of the Spirit; through his participation in the community of the Church.¹⁴²

In sum, in his exegesis, Origen introduced elements of his cosmology and anthropology. Thus, the presence of sin was only implied in terms of the soul's potential fall. In any case, divine abandonment was not discussed in terms of sin and chastisement, but as part of divine *paideia*. Origen mastered his exegesis in such a way that brought forth a positive attitude towards the soul's spiritual ascension. In

¹⁴¹ Origen, *Com.* 2.11.167. Origen distinguished between various levels of revelation with regard to the Logos' presence; the Logos' fragrance and his presence. Origen referred to the latter (i.e. presence) in the future tense, thus indicating its anticipation by the soul. See also Origen, *Com.* 1.4.78. Origen gave an eschatological twist to his argument. He referred to the union between the soul and Christ. According to Origen, the Logos has taken over the soul's physical and spiritual functions: "What, do you think, will they do when the Word of God takes possession of their hearing, their sight, their touch, and their taste as well, and offers excellences from Himself that match each single sense according to its nature and capacity"?

¹⁴² Cheek, *Eschatology*, 120.

contrast to Otis' view, the theme of divine abandonment in Origen addressed the dynamic presence of God within history. It also highlighted the eschatological horizon of the union between God and the soul, always emphasising divine *paideia* as God's intervention to lead the soul to ethical perfection.

b. Gregory of Nyssa: the intellectual abandonment

In his exegesis, Gregory of Nyssa acknowledged his indebtedness to Origen.¹⁴³ Gregorian interpretation incorporated the main elements of Origenist exegesis with regard to the value of the *Song* and the identification of the characters. Gregory also exploited the Origenist notion of God's progressive manifestation in the Old Testament that reached its climax with the incarnation.¹⁴⁴ Overall, Gregory worked on the Origenist understanding of the *Song* as a depiction of the soul's progressive introduction to the divine mysteries. However, where Origen only implied a direct manifestation of the Logos to the soul, always mediated by his manifestation in the scriptures, Gregory explicitly taught the direct presence of the Logos within the soul that transcended his manifestation within the scriptures. Gregory established his exegesis on a mystical experience between the soul and God, where the soul has searched for knowledge of what God is within his nature. But this is not to say that Gregory was an intellectualist. For the soul's moral life played an important role in his interpretation. Not only had the soul ascended to knowledge of the divine mysteries, but she also advanced in her moral life. Daniélou and Meredith have highlighted Gregory's moral teaching to be of equal value with his idea of divine *gnosis*.¹⁴⁵ Meredith commented that in Gregory's works of exegetical maturity,

the moral, the contemplative and the ascetic life are deeply related to each other. In his earlier writings he seems to have thought of the relation as only one-way, that is, of virtue as the gateway to *gnōsis*; but in his more mature writings the movement is two way.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Gregory, *Hom.* Prologus, 13. For the details of this work see, J. B. Cahill, 'The Date and Setting of Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary on the Song of Songs', *JThS* 32 (1981), 447-460. Also, J. Munitiz, 'The Church at Prayer: Ecclesiological Aspects of St. Gregory of Nyssa's *In Cantica Cantorum*', *EsChR*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Autumn 1971), 385-395. J. Daniélou, 'Chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nysse', *SP* 7 (1966), 159-169. M. Canévet, 'Exégèse et théologie dans les traités spirituels de Grégoire de Nysse', in M. Harl (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 144-168. A. Meredith, 'The Homilies on the Song of Songs', in *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood NY: SVS, 2000), 78-89.

¹⁴⁴ Gregory, *Hom.* 5, 140ff.

¹⁴⁵ Meredith, 'Contemplation and Virtue', in *The Cappadocians*, 59-62.

¹⁴⁶ Meredith, *ibid.*, 61 and 69. In Meredith's own words, "as was already clear from the *Homilies on the Beatitudes* Gregory was becoming increasingly convinced that Christian excellence was ethical rather than mystical".

Gregory's position was that the more the soul advanced morally, the more she was introduced to the divine mysteries.¹⁴⁷ The introduction of the soul to the divine mysteries meant that the soul had realised the presence of the image of the groom within her. In fact, Gregory followed two directions that lead to the same position: due to her participation in the divine image the soul was able to participate in the virtues. And it was because of her virtuous life that she had recovered the divine image within.¹⁴⁸ The two positions were equally balanced in Gregory's exegesis.

It is commonplace that, in Gregory's *Homilies* on the *Song*, the theme of divine abandonment had addressed divine transcendence. Indeed, the two works of Gregory's spiritual and exegetical maturity, i.e., *De Vita Moisis* and *In Canticum*, give evidence to Gregory's progressive attachment to a more apophatic language with regard to spiritual life: at the summit of spiritual life is knowledge of the divine being. But, as Balthasar put it, such knowledge could only conceive the existence (εἶναι) of the divine being (ὄντως ὄν), without disclosing what the divine is in its nature.¹⁴⁹ In the *De Vita Moisis*, Gregory addressed the progressive ascension of Moses from "light" (φῶς)¹⁵⁰ to "darkness" (γνόφος)¹⁵¹ and unknowability.¹⁵² In *In Canticum*, Gregory observed the fact that the bride was suddenly abandoned by the groom.¹⁵³ It is acknowledged that Gregory argued theological positions according to the text that he was interpreting. Thus, in the former work, Moses ascended to various conditions. In the latter work, the bride did not ascend; she found and suddenly lost.¹⁵⁴ Yet, Gregory brought together the notions of ascension and abandonment since he indicated that both biblical images have addressed divine incomprehensibility: the soul realised that it is impossible to grasp fully the divine

¹⁴⁷ Balás illustrated the close relationship between Gregory's anthropology, ethical thought and mystical theology. The soul was meant to participate in the divine attributes. Virtue was an attribute of God. Thus, "the consummation of virtuous life is said to consist in the 'participation in God'". See D. Balás, 'Participation and Spiritual Life', in *Μετουσία Θεοῦ: Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*, *Studia Anselmiana* 55 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1966), 152-157.

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion on the notion of participation see Balás, *Μετουσία Θεοῦ*. Also, M. E. Keenan, 'De Professione Christiana and De Perfectione: A Study of the Ascetical Doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', *DOP* 5 (1950), 167-207. Also, G. B. Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', *DOP* 12 (1958), 59-94.

¹⁴⁹ Balthasar, 'The Philosophy of Becoming and Desire', in *Présence*, 27-108.

¹⁵⁰ Gregory, *Moses*, 2.19. Cf. Ex 3:2ff.

¹⁵¹ Gregory, *ibid*, 2.162. Cf. Ex 20:21.

¹⁵² Gregory, *ibid*, 2.233. Cf. Ex 33:18-23.

¹⁵³ Gregory, *Hom.* 6, 181. Cf. Sol 3:1-4.

¹⁵⁴ For instance, compare Ex 33:18-23 to Sol 3:4.

being as it is in its nature.¹⁵⁵ It lies beyond the limits of this thesis to argue the sources and discuss the exegetical technicalities of Gregory's position with regard to the divine incomprehensibility/infinity. What needs to be noted is the fact that Gregory seems to be the first Christian thinker who associated incomprehensibility with divine infinity: God knows no limits since there is no other quality in his essence to limit him.¹⁵⁶ From this ontological observation, Gregory moved to the idea that divine infinity implied that spiritual life was an unceasing quest. Since God was infinite, the soul's ascension was a ceaseless quest.

At this point, we shall make three observations with regard to Gregory's position on the theme of divine abandonment. We will deal with i) the relationship between abandonment and ascension in the *In Canticum* and *De Vita Moisis*; ii) the notion of abandonment as a state of perfection; and iii) the connection between abandonment, trials and sin.

i) The motif of divine abandonment was peculiar to Gregory's *In Canticum*. We need to remember that, in his *De Vita*, Gregory introduced the theme of ascension, but not abandonment. In this latter work, Gregory held the same position as *In Canticum* that divine being lies beyond the soul's intellectual (discursive) and intelligible comprehension. Moses' desire to reach the summit of divine knowledge had remained unfulfilled: God was surrounded by darkness.¹⁵⁷ It is through the latter motif that Gregory has introduced divine incomprehensibility. Gregory

¹⁵⁵ Gregory, *Moses*, 2.236: "Παιδεύεται γὰρ διὰ τῶν ειρημένων ὅτι τὸ Θεῖον κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ φύσιν ἀόριστον, οὐδενὶ περιειργόμενον πέρατι" (Moses is instructed from what has been said, that the Divine is of itself infinite, circumscribed by no limit) [trans. Meredith]. Gregory, *Hom.* 12, 370: "εἶδε τὸ ἀόριστόν τε καὶ ἀπεριγράφτον τοῦ ἀγαπωμένου κάλλος ἐν πάσῃ τῇ αἰδιότητι τῶν αἰώνων κρεῖττον ἕει εβρισκόμενον" (she saw the infinite and uncircumscribed beauty of the beloved, which is always found anew in the eternity of the ages).

¹⁵⁶ For a thorough discussion on the matter in the light of the *Song* see: M. Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge and Divine Presence*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2004). Also, J. Daniélou, 'La Ténèbre ou de l'amour', in *Platonisme*, 175-307. M. Laird, 'Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness: A Reconsideration', *JR* 79, no. 4 (Oct. 1999), 592-616. Daniélou's introduction in Grégoire de Nysse, *Vie de Moïse*, J. Daniélou (ed.), SC1 (Paris: Cerf, 1955), xiv. Also, A.K. Geljon, 'Divine Infinity in Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria', *VgCh* 59 (2005), 152-177. A. Meredith, 'Gregory of Nyssa', in *The Cappadocians*, 62ff. K. Ware, 'God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence-Energies Distinction', *EsChR*, vol. 7, no.2 (1975), 125-136. V. Lossky, 'Darkness and Light in Knowledge of God', trans. E. Every, *EsChQ* 8 (1969), 460-471. M. Laird, 'Apophasis and Logophasis in Gregory Nyssa's Commentarius in Canticum Cantorum', *SP* 37 (2001), 126-132.

¹⁵⁷ Gregory, *Moses*, 2.162-164: "Τοτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἐν φωτί, νῦν δὲ ἐν γνώφῳ τὸ Θεῖον ὁρᾶται... Ὅτε οὖν μείζων ἐγένετο κατὰ τὴν γνώσιν ὁ Μωϋσῆς, τότε ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Θεὸν ἐν γνώφῳ ἰδεῖν, τουτέστι τότε γινῶναι ὅτι ἐκεῖνό ἐστι τῇ φύσει τὸ Θεῖον ὃ πάσης γνώσεώς τε καὶ καταλήψεώς ἐστιν ἀνώτερον" (then the Deity was seen in the light, now is it seen in the cloud... it is only when Moses has increased in knowledge that he confesses that he beheld God in the cloud, that is, that he knows that the Divine is by nature something above all knowledge and comprehension) [trans. Meredith]. Cf. 2 Sm. 22:10.

communicated this position without referring to the theme of abandonment or the image of the bride of the biblical Song. This latter interaction was also peculiar to his *In Canticum*. For, in this latter work, Gregory brought into play the image of Moses which he related to the biblical bride.¹⁵⁸ The introduction of the theme of Moses' progressive ascension from light to darkness helped Gregory develop his position on divine incomprehensibility in the *In Canticum*. However, the main device through which Gregory supported divine incomprehensibility in this latter work is the theme of divine abandonment. Daniélou aptly observed that Gregory altered his exegesis according to the text on which he was working. It is the fact that biblical narratives present diverging imageries that urged Gregory to follow diverging interpretations. In the *De Vita*, God had communicated with Moses and yet he denied Moses access to his divine nature. The imagery was that of ascension, communication and denial (darkness). In the *Song of Songs*, the groom had suddenly abandoned the bride. The *Song* illustrated the similes of communication, separation (darkness) and re-union. Laird indicated a shift in Gregory's exegesis in his *In Canticum*: according to Laird, the *In Canticum* illustrates a more optimistic position in Gregory with regard to the summit of spiritual life. If, in his *De Vita*, Gregory had argued in terms of darkness and incomprehensibility, in the *In Canticum*, Gregory shifted to the language of union and light.¹⁵⁹ It is true that the motif of abandonment was part of the narrative.

¹⁵⁸ Gregory, *Hom.* 6. 181. For Meredith, though the two accounts of the *De Vita* and *In Canticum* shared common themes with regard to spiritual progress, they also had dissimilarities that need to be taken into account. See Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 84. According to Meredith, Gregorian exegesis on the *Song* saw γνόφος to be at the summit of spiritual ascension, as opposed to σκότος of the *De Vita*. Also, Gregory has expounded his exegesis on the *Song* by alluding to Ex 20:21; in the *Vita Moisis*, he has highlighted the theological importance of Ex 33:20-23. For Meredith, exegesis on the *Song* addressed divine incomprehensibility; whereas the *Vita Moisis* focused on divine infinity. However, in both works Gregory interlinked γνόφος and σκότος without significantly differentiating between the two terms. The γνόφος is the dark cloud in which God dwells.

¹⁵⁹ See Laird, 'Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness'. Laird acknowledges that it was Meredith that supported this balance between light and darkness in Gregory. See Meredith, 'Gregory of Nyssa', in *The Cappadocians*, 52-101. For Meredith, the theme of darkness was never really integrated into his commentary on the *Song*. Meredith, *ibid*, 84. Laird argued against the idea that Gregory was a mystic of "darkness". According to him, Gregory introduced the theme of darkness and discursive separation to the same degree at which he also introduced the motif of union in light. According to Laird, it was in his *In Canticum* that Gregory presented his most elegant balance between "darkness mysticism" and "light" spirituality. In doing so, Laird moderated the significance of Puech and Daniélou's position that Gregory was a mystic of darkness *par excellence*. For instance, Crouzel had argued that, "Origen and Gregory of Nyssa have often been contrasted by attributing to the former a mysticism of light and to the latter a mysticism of darkness". In Crouzel's thought, Gregory and Origen provided different exegetical and theological insights due to Origen's refutation of the Montanists and Gregory's defence against Eunonius. However, Crouzel had concluded that "behind the different forms of expressions, it is by no means certain that the experience of the one was all that different from the experience of the other". Crouzel, *Origen*, 121. See also Daniélou,

Yet, the theme of abandonment needs to be seen in connection to the notion of union. Rather than dealing with utter separation of ‘discursive’ and ‘intelligent’ thought (διάνοια-νοῦς) from the divine reality, Gregory highlighted the notion of separation and re-union. Any overemphasis to the exegetical similarities between the *De Vita* and *In Canticum* would do an injustice to the fact that the motif of love - being the main element of the *Song*- communicated the notion of union between God and the soul. Thus, the theme of abandonment needs to direct us to the motif of re-union between bride and groom.

ii) Despite the fact that Plotinus and Philo had both touched upon the idea of divine infinity,¹⁶⁰ it is only Gregory who argued the notion of divine abandonment as the summit of knowledge about God. It needs to be noticed that Origen, in his *Commentary on John*, had also addressed the theme of separation with regard to the soul’s perception of the divine. However, it is acknowledged that Origen never supported divine infinity.¹⁶¹ What Origen indicated is the fact that the Logos remained with the intellect¹⁶² for as long as the latter was capable of holding him; but, he would soon depart. Origenist exegesis depended on Jn 2:11 and 4:40 and lacked the Gregorian overtones of the soul’s seeking of and ascending to “knowing God in unknowing”, since Origen denied divine infinity.¹⁶³

Platonisme, 190-199. Idem, ‘Mystique de la ténèbre chez Grégoire de Nysse’, in *DSp* 2.2, 1872-1886. H.C. Puech, ‘La Ténèbre mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite et dans la tradition patristique’, in *En Quête de la gnose: La gnose et les temps et autres essais*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque des sciences humaines (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 119-141. For a thorough analysis of the imagery of union in the *In Canticum* see: Laird, ‘Fountain of Presence, Breasts of Wine: The Flow of Knowledge in the *In Canticum Canticorum*’, in *Grasp of Faith*, 131-153.

¹⁶⁰ See: Geljon, ‘Divine Infinity in Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria’. Geljon has criticised Mühlenberg’s position that Gregory was the first thinker to introduce the theme of divine infinity. He shared sides with Guyot –while remaining critical of him- so that “starting points” of the notion of divine infinity originated in Philo. See E. Mühlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa: Gregors Kritik am Gottesbegriff der Klassischen Metaphysik*, Forschungen zur Kirchen und Dogmengeschichte 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966). H. Guyot, *L’Infinité divine depuis Philon le juif jusque à Plotin* (Paris: Alcan 1906).

¹⁶¹ Origen, *Commentariis in Evangelium Joannis*, 13.52.347 [pg 224 in SC 222]. Origen scholars have indicated that Origen maintained the Platonic argument that the unlimited --hence undefined-- equaled to the the non-being. It was the latter that lacked any kind of form and definition. See Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 13 and 66: Gregory turned the argument to his own favour arguing that what defines a limit is the presence of an opposite quality (e.g. light and darkness). For the reason that God did not accommodate opposite qualities (e.g. good-evil) in him, the divine was undefined and unlimited. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, 1.168 [edition in GNO 1]. See Otis, ‘Cappadocian Thought’.

¹⁶² Allegorised in the similes of the Canaanites and the Samaritans of the gospel.

¹⁶³ Despite the fact that both Gregory and Origen referred to the soul’s limitation to grasp the divine, their respective positions had commenced on differing anthropologies and theologies. Origen attributed such limitation to human weakness due to the fall. Gregory rendered incomprehensibility to divine nature as such. See Laird, ‘Mysticism of Darkness’, 593 [footnote no. 3].

However, it is in another point that Origen and Gregory came close in their exegesis. Origen and Gregory envisaged separation from the divine as an experience that took place at a spiritually mature level. For Origen, at the summit of spiritual development, the soul had experienced trials that Origen associated with divine separation. Origen's argument held more ethical overtones than that of Gregory of Nyssa. In his turn, the Cappadocian exegete maintained a more sophisticated argument than Origen's: he did not refer to trials, but to divine incomprehensibility.¹⁶⁴ Yet, for both authors, we need to notice that the theme of abandonment was introduced after the soul's initial ascension. It is the biblical narrative that urged the two exegetes to introduce the theme of separation and reunion. However, they both established their thought on theological and anthropological suppositions. For Origen and Gregory, the *Song of Songs* drew its theological value from the fact that its content was of one accord with divine revelation. Thus, the motif was incorporated in their exegeses as a theme introduced in the biblical narrative. Origen indicated that divine *paideia* found its ultimate expression at the summit of spiritual life where the soul remained subjected to trials. Origen argued the above position in his other works, such as *De Oratione*, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* and *Homiliae in Numeros*. Gregory dismissed this Origenist line of interpretation in his *De Vita* and *In Canticum*. Yet, he maintained the notion of divine *paideia*. Only this time, *paideia* did not instruct the soul about her fall (Origen), but about the true nature of the divine. Thus, the fact remains that both exegetes attested that the soul experienced abandonment –in different levels-- in her pursuit for the divine groom.

It is apparent that Origen and Gregory referred to different kinds of experiences connected to the theme of abandonment. For Origen, it was an experience in ethical terms where the soul was subjected to trials. Yet we need to remember that Origen also associated the experience with the hiding of the groom from the intellect. For Origen, the soul remained puzzled about the meaning of the scriptures. For Gregory, the experience revealed the incomprehensibility of the divine nature. We could not overlook this fundamental difference between the two exegetes. Yet, we need not exaggerate their exegetical divergence. Like Origen, Gregory also presented the experience of abandonment as a distressful condition.

¹⁶⁴ See the overall presentation in Gregory, *Hom.* 6, 173-199 and 12, 340-370.

Balthasar highlighted the importance of the soul's frustration and despair in his *Présence et Pensée*.¹⁶⁵ Laird smoothed over any Origenist overtones by indicating that for Gregory, the soul did not really reach despair since she was not deprived of the divine presence altogether. Even though she did not fully grasp the divine, her desire was fulfilled through the presence of the divine within her (divine image). We could not agree more with Laird's observation. Yet, the fact remains that both Origen and Gregory attested that, at the stage of spiritual maturity, an experience has taken place that took the soul by surprise and momentarily caused distress to her. Both exegetes derived this position from the imagery presented in the *Song*. The imagery of separation is followed after the simile of union.

Mosshammer has researched on Gregory's intellectual development from his *De Beatitudinibus* to his *In Canticum*.¹⁶⁶ His article is an excellent presentation of the way that Gregory's thought developed throughout the years. However, Mosshammer did not discuss the fact that Gregory advanced his thought further in distinction to the Origenist tradition. This fact becomes more apparent when we take into consideration Gregory's exegesis on the third beatitude,¹⁶⁷ and compare it to his interpretation on Sol 3:1. In both cases Gregory presented the idea of distress that

¹⁶⁵ Balthasar, *Présence*, 104. Balthasar construed Gregory's thought with regard to the Cappadocian's insights on the structure of "time" and "being". Cf. Gregory, *Hom.* 12, 369: "τρόπον τινά πλήσεται καὶ τραυματίζεται τῇ ἀνελπιστίᾳ τοῦ ποθομένου ἀτελῆ τε καὶ ἀναπόλαυστον τοῦ καλοῦ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν νομίσασα" (in a way, the soul is hurt and wounded in despair by thinking that the longing for the desired is imperfect and the good cannot be enjoyed). Laird and Balás dismissed a psychological overemphasis on such sadness that could argue that the soul remains clueless about the divine. Aply, they indicated that, according to Gregory, it was the very pursuit that turned to the soul's spiritual satisfaction. Laird, *Grasp of Faith*, 88-89 and especially pg. 96 [footnote no. 179] where Laird has criticised Balthasar's position. Williams had reached the same conclusion with Laird. See R. Williams, 'Makrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion', in L. R. Wickham et. al (eds.), *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in Tribute to George Christopher Stead* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 242. For Laird, the issue is not whether soul experiences a sort of frustration, but whether she is presented with a 'consolation prize'. Williams has focused on the relation between soul's life and natural passions. Balás, *Μετουσία Θεοῦ*, 158. Cf. Gregory, *Hom.* 12, 369: "περιαιρεῖται τὸ τῆς λύπης θέριστρον διὰ τοῦ μαθεῖν ὅτι τὸ αἰεὶ προκόπτειν ἐν τῷ ζητεῖν καὶ τὸ μηδέποτε τῆς ἀνόδου παύεσθαι τοῦτό ἐστιν ἡ ἀληθῆς τοῦ ποθομένου ἀπόλαυσις τῆς πάντοτε πληρουμένης ἐπιθυμίας ἐτέραν ἐπιθυμίαν τοῦ ὑπερκειμένου γεννώσης" (she removes the garment of sorrow when learning that, to progress always in pursuit and never to cease ascending, this is the true pleasure of the desired; the desire that is fulfilled becomes the beginning of another desire of what lies above). K. Rombs, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Epektasis: Some Logical Implications', *SP* 37 (2001), 288-293

¹⁶⁶ A. A. Mosshammer, 'Gregory's Intellectual Development: A Comparison of the *Homilies on the Beatitudes* with the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*', in H. R. Drobner and A. Viciano (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, VgCh 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 359-387.

¹⁶⁷ Mt 5:5: "blessed are the sorrowful, for they shall be comforted". Gregory, *Beat.* 3.98.24ff [reference to number of homily, and page in GNO 7.2].

has taken place at the soul's spiritual ascension.¹⁶⁸ For Gregory, the beatitudes were a spiritual ladder of ascensions. The beatitudes were addressed to spiritually mature souls that were advancing in spiritual life. Gregory commented on the fact that, in the beatitudes, mourning was part of the third beatitude: mourning was close to the peak of spiritual ascension.¹⁶⁹ According to Gregory, in an Origenist fashion, at the summit of spiritual life, the soul meditated on her nature, her previous condition (i.e. before the fall) and the fact that she had rediscovered a treasure that she possessed but lost due to her fall.¹⁷⁰ Gregory defined sorrow as “the loss of something the heart was set upon”, i.e. a deprivation.¹⁷¹ His exegesis echoed the Origenist *Homilies* on the *Song*: the soul needed to meditate on her nature, in order to advance to further spiritual heights. Most significantly, Gregory seems to have accommodated the classical image of the Platonic cave in the *Republic*:¹⁷² the soul that had looked upon light descended to the shadowy world.¹⁷³ Origen had explicitly engaged the role of trials as *paideia* in this instance; a fact that Gregory continued to overlook. Gregory focused on the contrast between the soul's previous status and her current condition. Grief was the product of the soul's spiritual progress. The more she realised her loss of divine heights, the more she grieved about this loss. Gregory emphasised the fact that the soul possessed this Good before the fall.¹⁷⁴

In the *In Canticum*, grief appears in connection with divine incomprehensibility. Gregory had presented the idea of divine transcendence in his earlier work *De Beatitudinibus*. He also related transcendence to grief in this

¹⁶⁸ For a discussion of Gregorian exegesis on Mt 5:4 see, Fr. Vinel, ‘Grégoire de Nysse, *De Beatitudinibus*: Oratio III, “Bienheureux les affligés, parce qu’ils seront consolés”’, in Drobner and Viciano (eds.), *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, 139-147.

¹⁶⁹ Again, Gregory was following the scriptural narrative that presented Christ as addressing the beatitudes from a high place (hill). Cf. Mt. 5:1. Gregory, *Beat.* 2.89.31 and also 3.98.24.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory, *Beat.* 3.104.1.

¹⁷¹ Gregory, *Beat.* 3.102.16: “πένθος ἐστὶ σκυθρωπὴ διάθεσις τῆς ψυχῆς, ἐπὶ στερήσει τινὸς τῶν καταθυμίων συνισταμένη” [trans. Hall].

¹⁷² Plato, *Respublica*, 516e. For the use of Plato's cave in Gregory see A. Meredith, ‘Plato's “Cave” (*Republic* vii 514a-517e) in Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa’, *SP* 27 (1993), 49-61.

¹⁷³ Gregory, *Beat.* 3.103.17: “ὁ δὲ τῇ ἀπολαύσει τοῦ ἔξω φωτὸς συνειθισμένος, ἐξ ἐπηρείας τινὸς κατὰ κλειστός γένηται, οὐχ ὁμοίως ἀμφοτέρων ἢ τῶν παρόντων καθάπτεται συμφορὰ, ὁ μὲν γὰρ εἰδὼς οὐ ἐστέρηται, βαρεῖαν ποιεῖται τοῦ φωτὸς τὴν ζημίαν” (the other is used to the pleasure of the light outside and has been shut in by some hostile act. The present circumstances affect them quite differently: the one who knows what he has been deprived of takes the loss of light very hard).

¹⁷⁴ Gregory, *Beat.* 3.105.10: “Τούτου μέντοι τοῦ ὑπεραίροντος πᾶσαν δύναμιν καταληπτικῆν, ἐν μετουσίᾳ ποτὲ ἡμεν οἱ ἄνθρωποι” (Yet, this which transcends all power of understanding is something we human beings once enjoyed as participants). Gregory has referred to the imprint of the divine image in the soul.

instance.¹⁷⁵ It was not divine incomprehensibility that caused the soul's grief, but the idea that she had fallen from her previous blessed status. Thus, Gregory employed a semi-Origenist line of reasoning. However, in his *In Canticum*, Gregory refined his thought by highlighting the close relation between grief and divine transcendence. From a sort of anthropologically-connected perception of grief which bears more psychological overtones, Gregory moved to a theological conception that emphasised grief as intimately connected to divine knowledge.¹⁷⁶ What we need to conclude is that, despite this shifting in his exegetical position, Gregory maintained the idea of an "event" within spiritual life that, in its own terms, saddened the soul without involving the notion of sin or trials. In his *De Beatitudinibus*, Gregory illustrated a clear distinction between past, present and future:

The one who has been able to look upon the truly Good and thereafter considered the poverty of human nature, will surely hold his soul to be unfortunate, regarding it as a sorrow that his present life is deprived of that Good. Therefore the saying does not seem to me to bless the pain, but rather the knowledge of the good, since what is being sought is not present in life.¹⁷⁷

iii) Finally, the lack of any reference to sin as cause of abandonment remained among the main features of Gregorian exegeses on the *Song*. Origen had only implied the presence of sin in his work and only with regard to her *paideia*. Thus, the soul was not chastised by the experience. She was instructed to look at her origin and realise her immanent weakness. Thus, even if Origen had referred to trials –in connection to divine abandonment- it was not sin that had caused the presence of trials.

Gregory maintained this distinction between the experience of divine abandonment and the presence of sin: it was not the latter that had caused divine abandonment. It is more likely that Gregory refrained from associating the two events because of the biblical narrative. For, as it was observed, the narrative

¹⁷⁵ Gregory, *Beat.* 3.105.5: "Ὅσα δὲ τῆς γνώσεως ἡμῶν ὑψηλότερον εἶναι τὸ ἀγαθὸν τῇ φύσει πιστεύομεν, τοσοῦτον μᾶλλον τὸ πένθος ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐπιτείνωμεν, ὅτι τοιοῦτόν ἐστι καὶ τοσοῦτον τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὐ διεξυγμένοι τυγχάνομεν, ὡς μηδὲ τὴν γνώσιν αὐτοῦ χωρεῖν δύνασθαι" (the more we believe the Good to be by nature higher than our knowledge, the more we intensify our sorrow, that the Good from which we find ourselves separated is such and so great that we cannot even attain the knowledge of it).

¹⁷⁶ The *De Beatitudinibus* features more homiletical elements through which Gregory attempted to move his audience. The *In Canticum* provides more evidence of Gregory's mature theology on divine infinity as part of his refutation of Eunomian Arianism and Apollinarianism.

¹⁷⁷ Gregory, *Beat.* 3.104.1: "ὃ τὸ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθὸν κατιδεῖν ἰσχύσας, ἔπειτα τὴν πτωχείαν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως κατανοήσας, ἐν συμφορᾷ τὴν ψυχὴν πάντως ἔξει, τῷ μὴ εἶναι ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἐκείνῳ τὸν παρόντα βίον, πένθος ποιούμενος. Οὐκοῦν οὐ τὴν λύπην μοι δοκεῖ μακαρίζειν ὁ Λόγος, ἀλλὰ τὴν εἰδησιν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἢ τὸ τῆς λύπης πάθος ἐπισυμβαίνει, διὰ τὸ μὴ παρῆναι τῷ βίῳ τὸ ζητούμενον".

provided no explicit hints of misdeeds that had caused the departure of the groom. Unlike Origen, Gregory overlooked the presence of sin altogether: the soul ascended to the divine unhindered. We agree with Otis that it was due to diverging anthropologies that Origen and Gregory presented different approaches to sin. As Otis observed, Origen was occupied with the idea of the soul's potential lapsing, and her "return" to the divine.¹⁷⁸ To this position, Otis juxtaposed Gregory's optimism: Gregory highlighted the soul's "pursuit" of divine knowledge instead.¹⁷⁹ This might be so. However, the reason why Gregory overlooked the presence of sin is not merely because he refined Origenism. As Meredith and Keenan have shown, Gregory illustrated the theological tension of Patristic literature to argue spiritual life in terms of the efficacy of the redemptive work of Christ.¹⁸⁰ Thus, that the soul ascended unhindered was not due to her knowledge of her own weakness, as Origen might have put it.¹⁸¹ It was due to the incarnation and the passion.¹⁸² Thus, Gregory viewed sin and human weakness as utterly overcome by means of the incarnation.

¹⁷⁸ For Otis, Origen was holding a Platonic understanding about the soul's changeability as a negative attribute: changeability meant moral mutability that urged the soul to move from good to evil. Otis, 'Cappadocian Thought', 101ff. On the opposite side, through his notion of *epektasis* as the unceasing quest for the divine, Gregory shifted the terms arguing that changeability was the quality that enabled the soul to pursue her unceasing quest to know God.

¹⁷⁹ Gregory, *Hom.* 12, 366: "διὰ τοῦτο πάντοτε τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινομένη οὐ παύεται καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐν ᾧ ἔστιν ἐξιῶσα καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἐνδότερον εἰσδυομένη ἐν ᾧ οὐπω ἐγένετο" (for this reason, she [the soul] does not cease always to stretch ahead, and leaving behind the place she is, she moves even deeper where she has not yet been).

¹⁸⁰ Athanasius might have been Gregory's source at this point. Cf. A. Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 69 and 87. See also, Keenan, 'De Professione Christiana' for Gregory's Christocentrism. As will be discussed in the 3rd part; indeed, in his *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius had envisaged the spiritual life in the light of the incarnation: Athanasius' Antony was victorious over passions due to Christ's victory over sin. For Meredith, Gregory's Christocentric argument was part of the Cappadocian's reaction to Appollinarian human minimalism in Christology. See Meredith, 'Plato's "Cave" (*Republic* vii 514a-517e) in Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa'.

¹⁸¹ Gregory, *Hom.* 6, 174: "[δ]ιὰ τῆς τῶν ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτάσεως ἐν λήθῃ γινομένων τῶν προδιηνησμένων" (stretching out, forgetting of what is behind). Cf. Phil 3.12. The term *epektasis* became a technical term only after Daniélou's monumental work on Gregory of Nyssa. Daniélou emphasised that *epektasis* connotes the soul's ceaseless pursuit for the divine due to divine infinity. See J. Daniélou, 'L'Épektase', in *Platonisme*, 291-307. Idem, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (Crestwood NY: SVS, 1979), 56-71. M. Canévet, 'Le Perception de la présence de Dieu: A propos d'une expression de la XIe homélie sur le *Cantique des Cantiques*', in J. Fontaine and Ch. Kannengiesser (eds.), *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 443-454.

¹⁸² Gregory, *Hom.* 2, 51: "[γ]έγονε μὲν ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη φύσις τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ φωτός ἀπεικόνισμα πόρρω τῶν σκοτεινῶν χαρακτήρων τῇ τοῦ ἀρχετύπου κάλλους ὁμοιότητι στίλβουσα, ὃ δὲ πειρασμός τὸν φλογώδη καύσωνα δι' ἀπάτης ἐπιβαλὼν... εὐθὺς διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς ἀποξηράνας... διὰ τῆς καύσεως μέλαν ἐποίησεν" (human nature became an image of the true light, shining forth the archetypal beauty far from dark features; the temptation cast upon it the flaming heat through deception... he immediately dried it up... he blackened it through burning heat). In this passage, Christ's redemptive work is realised in the efficacy of baptism. The soul had lost her divine image through the fall. But baptism restored this divine image within the soul.

But this is not to say that Gregory believed that the soul was assaulted by trials any more. He illustrated such trials in terms of hindrance:

[The soul] should look into herself and walk on the divine way with every safety, leaping across and overcoming all the hindrances that appear on her way from temptations.¹⁸³

We need to note that in this present passage from *In Canticum*, Gregory maintained a good deal of Origenist thought:¹⁸⁴ the soul had meditated on her nature, and thus, she overcame what might obstruct her way to the divine. It is important to highlight the fact that Gregory referred to temptations that seem to continue afflicting the soul. Indeed, Gregory did not deny that the soul remained subjected to assaults from evil spirits and *pride*:

So, if someone establishes his soul to have tranquility in waveless silence, [the soul] shall not be disturbed by the evil spirits, or arrogant in *pride*, or foamy from the waves of anger, or shaken by any other passion and wandering in the winds that stir up the various waves of passions.¹⁸⁵

What Gregory implied is that, at the summit of the spiritual life, the soul was not unassaulted by trials and temptations: the soul reached the stage of *apatheia*. The term indicates that the soul remained undisturbed from temptations assaulting her. As Daniélou has observed, temptations are coterminous with this present life.¹⁸⁶ As long as the soul had remained in this life, she remained subjected to trials and temptations. Comparing Origen with Gregory of Nyssa, Otis ably observed that “Gregory, of course, refers to temptation *en route*, but for him this is never a temptation to relapse once the final “shadow” has been entered”.¹⁸⁷ We need to view Otis’ observation in terms of Gregory’s eschatological direction. The soul remained afflicted by

¹⁸³ Gregory, *Hom.* 3, 80: “[π]ρὸς ἑαυτὴν βλέπειν καὶ δι’ ἀσφαλείας πάσης πρὸς τὸν θεῖον δρόμον ἐπειγεσθαι πάντα τὰ ἐκ πειρασμῶν τινῶν ἐγγινόμενα πρὸς τὸν δρόμον ἐμπόδια διαλλομένην καὶ υπερβαίνουσιν”. Cf. Gregory, *Beat.* 1.85.1ff: “Ὁ γὰρ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν, καὶ μὴ τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν βλέπων, οὐκ ἂν εὐλόγως εἰς τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐμπέσοι πάθος” (one who looks into himself and not at what is around him could not readily fall into such a condition). Gregory has used the same expression to show that the soul that has looked into herself could not be assailed by *pride*. At this instance, Gregory has exemplified that “looking into herself” means meditating on her humble origin. However, the overall homiletical overtones of the *De Beatitudinibus* suggest that Gregory has been carried away in addressing his audience rather than pondering on spiritual mysteries. *Pride* in the latter work seems not to have sprung from spiritual ascensions but earthly-possession.

¹⁸⁴ Gregory, *Hom.* 2, 58-59. The soul’s past sinfulness was related to her *pride*.

¹⁸⁵ Gregory, *Hom.* 3, 81: “εἰ τοίνυν οὕτω τις τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν καταστήσειεν, ὡς αὐτὴν τε γαλήνην ἔχειν ἐν ἀκύμονι τῇ ἡσυχίᾳ μηδὲν παρακινουμένην ἐκ τῶν πνευμάτων τῆς πονηρίας μήτε δι’ ὑπερηφανίας οἰδαινουσιν μήτε τοῖς τοῦ θυμοῦ κύμασιν εξαφρίζουσιν μήτε κατ’ ἄλλο τι πάθος κλυδωνιζομένην καὶ περιφερομένην παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῶν ποικίλων κύματα τῶν παθημάτων ἐγείροντι”.

¹⁸⁶ J. Daniélou, ‘La Lutte contre les Tentations’, in *Platonisme*, 87-92.

¹⁸⁷ Otis, ‘Cappadocian Thought’, 116 [footnote no. 52].

temptations. However, the grace brought by the incarnation “secured” the soul from lapsing. The soul continued to labour ethically until the time of her rest to come.¹⁸⁸

To this end, Gregory introduced the notion of interchanging periods between rest and trials, which seems to have developed independently of Origen. In fact, Gregory followed the language of the *Song* introducing the interaction between “winter” and “spring”. Whereas the latter connoted spiritual rest –the time that virtues had shone forth- the former period was synonymous with trials and temptations: “this present time lies between the two seasons of the winter dejection and of the summer communion of the fruits”.¹⁸⁹ Gregory presented the soul’s current condition as balancing between the cultivation of virtues and the expectation of trials. He made the distinction between “early figs” (ὄλυνθοι) and “mature figs” (γλυκέος και τελείου καρπού).¹⁹⁰ That is to say that, Gregory distinguished between the initial fruits of virtue and the mature works of virtue. This distinction was meant to introduce the position that this life is conducted with the interaction of the winter of trials and the spring of virtue. Thus, Gregory maintained the Origenist tension between resting and labouring. Regardless of the soul’s spiritual ascension to the divine, the present life was expected to be conducted in labour and rest. Gregory alluded to Mt 13:39 to bring forth the scriptural foundation of his argument:

For this reason, on the one hand, it expressly announces the provision of evils, and on the other hand, it does not present perfectly the fruits of virtue. But, she [i.e. the soul] will deposit them in proper time, when the summer shall come. You know

¹⁸⁸ Modern research discusses Gregory’s eschatology in terms of his universalism and also his position of *epektasis*. For instance see: A. A. Mosshammer, ‘Historical Time and the Apokatastasis according to Gregory of Nyssa’, *SP* 27 (1993), 70-93. Also, M. Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, OThM (Oxford: OUP, 2000). Thus, modern research overlooks the fact that an aspect of Gregory’s eschatology was that the soul was expecting her liberation from trials. If the idea of *epektasis* and the unknowing knowledge of God had, somehow, limited the importance of eschatology for Gregory, the fact that in both *De Beatitudinibus* and *In Canticum* Gregory illustrated a firm distinction between “here” and “there” or “now” and “then”, gives evidence that, in his thought, Gregory incorporated a genuine Christian anticipation of the *eschaton* as the point in history that would bring something new to the soul. M. Alexandre, ‘Perspectives eschatologiques dans les homélies sur les *Béatitudes* de Grégoire de Nysse’, in Drobner and Viciano (eds.), *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, 257-291.

¹⁸⁹ Gregory, *Hom.* 5, 155: “[Ο] δὲ καιρὸς οὗτος μεθόριός ἐστι τῶν δύο καιρῶν, τῆς τε χειμερινῆς κατηφείας καὶ τῆς ἐν τῷ θέρει τῶν καρπῶν μετουσίας”.

¹⁹⁰ Gregory, *Hom. op. cit.*: “τὸ τοίνυν πρὸ τοῦ γλυκέος τε καὶ τελείου καρποῦ ὑπὸ τῆς συκῆς ἐν καρπῶν εἶδει προβαλλόμενον ὄλυνθος λέγεται, ὅπερ καὶ αὐτὸ μὲν ἐδώδιμον ἔσθ’ ὅτε τοῖς βουλομένοις ἐστίν. οὐ μὴν ἐκεῖνό ἐστιν ὁ καρπός, ἀλλὰ τοῦ καρποῦ προοίμιον γίνεται” (so that, which appears before the sweet and mature fruit from the fig tree in the form of a fruit, is called an early fig, and it is edible for those that desire it; it is not the mature fruit, but it is the beginning of the mature fruit).

about the meaning of the summer from the voice of the Lord which says that: “the harvest is the consummation of the age”.¹⁹¹

Gregory presented this life as conducted in tension between labouring (winter) and resting (spring), until the Second Coming that signaled the soul’s harvesting the fruits of her virtue (summer). Thus, Gregory maintained a clear eschatological perspective.

In arguing thus, Gregory showed the need for moral and ethical struggle. Gregory exhorted to ethical vigilance and also presented us with the idea that spiritual life is not an intellectual exercise. Moral life was standing at the same level with the soul’s grasping God through faith.

Finally, we need to look more closely at the expression *μεθόριος*. Gregory did not find refuge in the notion of abandonment in order to argue that this life was balanced between two conditions. Unlike his contemporaries Macarius and Evagrius, Gregory developed a spirituality that derived from his distinct anthropology. This life is *μεθόριος* (being a boundary); for the human being is a *μεθόριον* being a boundary between heaven and earth, the intelligible and tangible, anticipation and fulfilment.¹⁹² In Ladner’s word,

[the] temporal rhythm is one of life and death, of wakefulness and sleep, of tension and relaxation, of continuous renewal until time be consumed and consummated in eternity. What Gregory says about reformation and time, resurrection and eternity, stands on the border line between the philosophical-physiological and the mystical-ascetical aspects of his anthropology.¹⁹³

Gregory developed an anthropology in which he implanted the notion of mediation at the centre: in all his aspects, man is a medium between two conditions. This position shows that Gregory provided a uniform understanding of man: before the

¹⁹¹ Gregory, *Hom. op. cit.*: “διὰ τοῦτο τὸ μὲν παρῳηκέναι τὰ κακὰ διαρρήδην εὐαγγελίζεται, τοὺς δὲ καρποὺς τῆς ἀρετῆς οὐπω τελείως προδείκνυσιν. ἀλλὰ τοῦτους μὲν ἐν τῷ καθήκοντι καιρῷ ταμειύσεται, ὅταν ἐνστῇ τὸ θέρος οἶδας δὲ πάντως τὸ διὰ τοῦ θέρους δηλούμενον ἐκ τῆς τοῦ κυρίου φωνῆς, ἢ τοῦτο φησιν ὅτι ‘Ὁ θερισμὸς συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐστίν’”.

¹⁹² Gregory, *Hom.* 11, 334: “ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη ψυχὴ δύο φύσεων οὖσα μεθόριος, ὧν ἡ μὲν ἀσώματός ἐστι καὶ νοερά καὶ ἀκήρατος ἡ δὲ ἕτέρα σωματικὴ καὶ βλώδης καὶ ἄλογος” (the human soul is being a boundary between two natures, the one bodiless and intelligible and uncompounded, the other bodiless and material and irrational). Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Opificio Hominis*, PG 44, 125-256. For the Christocentric dimension of Gregory’s *μεθόριος* see Balthasar, *Présence*, 146-147. L. Thunberg, ‘The Human as Microcosm’, in B. McGinn and J. Leclercq (eds.), *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, World Spirituality 16 (New York NY: Crossroad, 1985), 295-297. E. Corsini, ‘L’Harmonie du monde et l’homme microcosme dans le *De Hominis Opificio*’, in Fontaine and Kannengiesser (eds.), *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou*, 455-462. Cf. Nemesius of Emessa, *De Natura Hominis*, M. Morani (ed.), *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1987), 1,45 [pg. 5].

¹⁹³ Ladner, ‘The Philosophical Anthropology’, 59-94 [the above citation on pg. 86].

fall –mediating between intelligible and tangible; in this present life –mediating between labour and rest; and in the future life –mediating between anticipation and fulfilment. What Gregory achieved was a theological synthesis that maintained more positive elements about humanity than Origenist thought. Gregory gave his spiritual teaching a remarkable balance in arguing divine presence and absence without referring to sin, even as a potential foe. And again, the notion of absence due to divine incomprehensibility introduced the notion that man was meant to exist in a state of mediating between extreme conditions uniting them and illustrating their dialectical form.

c. Theodoret of Cyrrhus: the ethical development

Theodoret and Nilus formed their exegesis on the *Song* in a milieu that was already familiar with the work on the biblical text of the great masters, Origen and Gregory. Both authors were mentioned by name in Theodoret's work.¹⁹⁴ Despite the fact that Nilus did not refer to any exegete prior to his age, the critical text of Rosenbaum and Guérard's analysis of Nilus' commentary establishes the exegetical indebtedness of Nilus to Origen and Gregory.¹⁹⁵ It is important to demonstrate here the familiarity of the two exegetes with the work of Origen and Gregory in order to show their similarities with –and points of departure from– Origenist and Gregorian thought.

It needs to be noticed that, alongside the exegetical ambience of late antiquity, the two later exegetes were also familiar with the development of monastic thought across the Byzantine Empire. In what follows, we will demonstrate Theodoret and Nilus' ascetical connections. In doing so, we will suggest that the two exegetes of late antiquity have departed from Origenist and Gregorian exegesis as they have enriched their understanding of divine abandonment with ascetical ideals.

Origen had lived in the age of the last martyrs. Asceticism was primitive in its structures. Gregory of Nyssa knew Evagrius personally due to the strong affiliation between the young Evagrius and Gregory's brother Basil and his friend, Gregory of Nazianzus.¹⁹⁶ However, as Keenan observed, at that time, Gregory was only familiar

¹⁹⁴ Theodoret, *Expl. Præfatio*, 32B. Theodoret did not refer to their exegetical work, as such. He related that both authors had supported the spiritual value of the *Song*.

¹⁹⁵ See the introduction by Guérard in Nil d'Ancyre, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, vol. 1, M. G. Guérard (ed.), SC 403 (1994), 23.

¹⁹⁶ Basil had appointed Evagrius as lector. Bousset supported that Evagrius also received the monastic

with the ascetical system of two members of his family, i.e. Basil and Makrina.¹⁹⁷ The two had supported a coenobitic system of ascetical withdrawal from the world. It is established that Gregory's thought had an impact on young Evagrius.¹⁹⁸ What is of importance for us is that Gregory was interacting with a sort of premature ascetical spirituality.

This was not the same for Theodoret and Nilus who lived at a time when Evagrius had presented his unique synthesis on the ascetical life and the presence of the desert fathers was becoming more and more significant for the life of the Church. We take as a point of reference the development of Evagrian thought in the desert from the 4th to the 6th century A.D.¹⁹⁹

By the time Theodoret became bishop of Cyrrhus, Syria had become a thriving place for asceticism.²⁰⁰ His *Historia Religiosa* has provided the necessary historical evidence to establish the strong affiliation between the bishop of Cyrrhus and the ascetical communities in Syria. However, Urbainczyk has maintained that Theodoret composed this latter work for political reasons; in defence of Antiochean theology/spirituality –as opposed to Alexandrian theology/spirituality.²⁰¹ But such an argument overlooks the fact that the life of Theodoret had been marked by the presence of anchorites from an early age.²⁰² Primarily, it dismisses Theodoret's

habit from Basil. However, Bamberger doubted this position. See Bamberger's introduction in Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. J. E. Bamberger, CS 4 (1981), xxxvi-xxxvii [footnote no. 55]. Gregory of Nazianzus ordained Evagrius as a deacon shortly after A.D. 379 (Basil's death). Evagrius participated in the general council in Constantinople (A.D. 381), where Gregory of Nyssa opened the proceedings. Gregory himself dedicated a letter to Evagrius on the occasion of the latter's ordination. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Deitate adversus Evagrium*, GNO 9 (1967), 331-341.

¹⁹⁷ Keenan, 'De Professione Christiana', 169-172.

¹⁹⁸ Jaeger addressed Gregory's influence on Evagrius. See W. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*, Harvard Institute for Classical Studies (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 208ff. Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, xxxviii-xxxix.

¹⁹⁹ The first date coincides with the beginning of Evagrius' literary activity in the Egyptian desert. The latter date signifies the outburst of the Origenist-Evagrian controversy in the desert ascetical communities that reached its peak with the condemnation of Origenism-Evagrianism in A.D. 553 (2nd council in Constantinople).

²⁰⁰ For the history and character of monasticism in Syria see A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, vols. 1-2, CSCO 184&197 (1958-1960). Ph. Escolan, *Monachisme et église: Le monachisme syrien du IV^e au VII^e siècle*, *Théologie Historique* 109 (Paris: Beuchesne, 1999).

²⁰¹ Th. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

²⁰² Urbainczyk maintained the idea that any personal connection between Theodoret and the ascetics was introduced deliberately into the work in order to establish Theodoret's ecclesiastical status. See Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*. Theodoret related that he was the fruit of a monk's prayers since his mother could not conceive. See Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R. M. Rice, CS 88 (1985), Macedonius. For the bond of Theodoret with the Syrian ascetics from an early age see the introduction in CS 88, pg xi-xiii.

admiration for ascetical examples –since he, himself, was a monk at “Nicerte near Apameia”– and overlooks the fact that Theodoret composed his work at a time when ascetical biographies had become an established genre (e.g. Athanasius and Palladius).²⁰³ Rice observed that, even as a bishop, Theodoret maintained his monastic ideals –for a short time, he had the chance to return to his monastery in A.D. 449.²⁰⁴ That is not to say that ecclesiastical politics might not have been a strong drive for Theodoret to compose his *Historia Religiosa*.²⁰⁵ But, we need to acknowledge a deeper intimacy between the bishop of Cyrrhus and the Syrian ascetics.²⁰⁶ According to Canivet, Theodoret has reflected on such ideals in his *Historia Religiosa*.²⁰⁷ However, we agree with Urbainczyk about the content of the work. Theodoret’s *Historia Religiosa* was not composed as a work including ascetical teachings. Unlike the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and even the *Historia Lausiaca*, Theodoret has focused on the extraordinary character of the lives of the Syriac ascetics, as opposed to their spiritual teachings. Was Theodoret directly influenced by ascetical ideals when he was composing his *Explanatio in Canticum Cantorum*?

In the *Præfatio* of his commentary, Theodoret provided information about the circumstances under which he undertook his exegetical attempt on the *Song*:²⁰⁸ his addressee²⁰⁹ had requested Theodoret for such a commentary. Theodoret had indicated that, in composing his work, his main concern was with contemporary objections about the spiritual value of the work.²¹⁰ Yet, his addressee was not a monastic. In fact, Theodoret provided no hints that the work was read by monastics.

²⁰³ Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History*, xii. Cf. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Epistulae* 80 and 81 [in SC 98, pp. 188-198]

²⁰⁴ Theodoret, *A History*, xiii. Cf. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Epistula* 119 [in SC 111, pg.76-82].

²⁰⁵ For Pásztori-Kupán, the *In Canticum* and *Historia Religiosa* belonged to the same period of Theodoret’s theological career. See I. Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 2006), 18.

²⁰⁶ No modern monograph has discussed Theodoret’s spiritual thought in his *In Canticum*. Cf. P. Canivet, ‘La Spiritualité de Théodoret dans l’*Histoire Philothée*’, in Theodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des moines de Syrie: Histoire Philothée*, P. Canivet (ed.), SC 234 (1977), 44- 51.

²⁰⁷ For Syrian monastic ideals see P. Canivet, *Le Monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr*, *Theologie Historique* 42 (Paris: Beauchense, 1977). According to Vööbus the translation of the Evagrian corpus into Syrian might have occurred as early as the middle of the 5th century. See, A. Vööbus, ‘The Role of Evagrius’, in *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, vol. 3, CSCO 81 (1988), 142-150.

²⁰⁸ For Quasten, the commentary on the *Song* was the earliest exegetical attempt of Theodoret. J. Quasten, *Patrology: The Golden Age of Patristic Literature*, vol. 3 (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1960), 540.

²⁰⁹ The subscription of the work was addresses to “Θεοφιλεστάτῳ ἐπισκόπῳ Ἰωάννῃ”. According to Quasten it was John of Germanicia. Quasten, *ibid*, 540.

²¹⁰ Theodoret, *Expl. Præfatio*, 29A. For the historical context and related scepticism with regard to the exact circumstances that led to his commentary see Elliott, *Christology*, 35.

It remains to discuss whether Theodoret was reading the *Song* as a work of value for ascetics.

Theodoret presented a unique synthesis in his exegesis. It was observed that Origen and Gregory had illustrated two differing traditions: Origen referred to the presence of trials in the *Song of Songs* as linked to the notion of divine abandonment. Gregory had only discussed an intellectual understanding of the episode where the soul had been introduced to the notion of divine incomprehensibility. It was in the work of Theodoret that the two notions of ethical and intellectual exercise finally came together.

Theodoret related the incident to the tradition of the lamentation psalms. He indicated that the episode in Sol 3:1 echoed Ps 12:2. In the latter, the theme of God's "turning away his face" had been introduced.²¹¹ In discerning the inter-biblical connection between the *Song* and the lamentation Psalms, Theodoret highlighted the biblical foundation of the experience. The episode in Sol 3:1 was in conformity with the biblical imagery in the *Psalms*. Theodoret dealt with an episode that had occurred in other places in the biblical canon. By implying this position, Theodoret suggested that his exegesis was in conformity with the scriptural evidence. He also indicated that it was the biblical imagery that had provided evidence about the exegetical position that he needed to follow. Gregory had introduced divine infinity in his early works. Yet it was only when he composed exegeses on the *Song* and *Exodus* that he fully exploited the motif of divine abandonment. However, for Gregory, the motif of abandonment was a theological device for Christian anthropology. As in the case of Gregory, the motif of abandonment appeared only once in Theodoret's work, i.e. in his present commentary. There is no indication that Theodoret had incorporated the notion of divine abandonment within a broader anthropological context –as opposed to his seniors Macarius and Evagrius.

Theodoret's initial silence about the cause of the experience -at least in his opening lines- indicated his dependence on the biblical narrative, as opposed to a systematic exposition of Christian anthropology:

²¹¹ This is not the only biblical allusion by Theodoret. He has also brought into play the case of Paul (2 Cor 12:7-9) and Elijah (1Kgs 19:4).

Many times while exercising the souls of the faithful, the God of all permits them to encounter manifold trials, sometimes giving the petitioners relief, sometimes delaying this gift, devising benefit from all quarters for his followers.²¹²

Despite the fact that Theodoret introduced the motif of divine *paideia* (γυμνάζων-παιδεύων), he did not discern a specific cause that would refer directly to the soul. For Theodoret, the groom has departed to exercise his beloved. However, Theodoret did not provide an analysis of that which needed to be exercised within the soul.

If we are to take into account Pásztori-Kupán's observation that Theodoret's exegetical works belong to the same period between Ephesus (A.D. 431) and Chalcedon (A. D. 451), then it seems that, in his *In Canticum*, Theodoret departed from his own exegetical line of reasoning. In his *Quæstiones ad Octateuchum*, Theodoret had indicated that God permitted trials to occur in order to exercise the soul's *self-determination* (αὐτεξούσιον). This is a line of reasoning that Theodoret had presented in various other places in his exegetical work.²¹³ It was *self-determination* that was the subject of divine *paideia*. In his *In Canticum*, Theodoret did not bring into play the motif of *self-determination*. Before we continue, we need to make some observations about Theodoret's exegesis.

i) Theodoret viewed the episode of Sol 3:1 as related to divine abandonment. In Gregory, the bride's abandonment had taken the form of divine hiddenness, as opposed to separation-forsakenness. Gregory identified divine presence with the soul's desire, i.e. the wound of God within the soul. Thus, Gregory presented a dialectic between presence and hiddenness: God was hiding; yet he was present within the soul through her desire. Theodoret followed another exegetical route: God truly abandoned the soul: "abandoning him (i.e. Elijah)²¹⁴ for a while... he appears to him".²¹⁵ Reflecting on the same episode, Gregory had used the verb *καταλείπω* while

²¹² Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113A: "Γυμνάζων πολλάκις ὁ τῶν ὅλων Θεὸς τῶν εὐσεβῶν τὰς ψυχὰς, πειρασμοῖς ποικίλοις συγχωρεῖ περιπίπτειν, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἀπαλλαγὴν αἰτουμένοις δίδωσι, ποτὲ δὲ ἀναβάλλεται τὴν δόσιν, πανταχόθεν ὠφέλειαν τοῖς θιασώταις μηχανώμενος".

²¹³ Cf. Theodoret of Cyrthus, *Quæstiones in Deuteronomium*, 37 [PG 80, 440A]: "οὐ βιάζεται δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὴν γνώμην, ἀλλὰ τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ παραχωρεῖ" ([God] does not force human choice, but makes way for self-determination). Theodoret, *Psal.* PG 80, 1716.41: "τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ παραχωρῶν, καὶ τὰς μὲν ἐπιβουλὰς μὴ κωλύων" ([God] makes way for self-determination without preventing hostilities). Idem, *Interpretatio in Ezechielis Prophetiam*, 21.17 [PG 81, 1013B]: "τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων παραχωρῶν, καὶ τῷ τρόπῳ τούτῳ δίκας τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων πραττόμενος" ([God] gives way to human self-determination, and in this way he lays judgement upon misdeeds).

²¹⁴ Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113C: "καταλιπὼν αὐτὸν πρὸς ὀλίγον... ἐπιφαίνεται αὐτῷ". Having introducing the case of Paul, Theodoret alluded to 1Kgs 19:4 (Elijah).

²¹⁵ Theodoret was familiar with the Platonic motif of a "sudden" appearance. The context, however, in which he used the motif was different in that he placed the term within a Christological context. Due

negating divine abandonment: “My beloved has departed, not abandoning the soul that follows him, but attracting her to him”.²¹⁶ Theodoret moved to the affirmative: “abandoning him for a while to be exercised”.²¹⁷

ii) This is not to say that God has forsaken the soul. Following Origenist exegesis, Theodoret related divine abandonment to the presence of trials. It is in trials that the soul comes to realise divine abandonment. However, Theodoret has developed this Origenist notion: divine abandonment does not refer to divine forsakenness. The motif took on the means of God’s postponing his intervention: God delays intervening in the soul’s trials.²¹⁸ Theodoret constantly reminded his reader of this position in his exegetical works. Despite the fact that God could have prevented trials, he gave his permission for them. This assertion played a single role in his work: to refute the Gnostic attack that God was the author of evil deeds/misfortunes. In relating trials to divine permission, Theodoret distinguished between *giving consent to* and *causing* trials. God did not cause trials. Yet he gave his consent: “the God of all permits them to encounter manifold trials”.²¹⁹ Theodoret had composed a work on divine providence (*De Providentia*) arguing that God was the author only of good deeds.²²⁰ In his exegesis, the term “συγχωρεῖ” was Theodoret’s device to distinguish between divine providence and misfortunes. Thus, he discerned that a divine plan had been at work.²²¹ The human individual was meant

to the incarnation, the soul was suddenly cleansed from her idolatry. Whereas, in Plato, Philo –and Origen to some extent- the adverb had addressed the encounter between God and soul, in Theodoret, the adverb referred to the advent of the Logos in his flesh. It was due to this latter fact that the soul was cleansed from her previous idolatry. Cf. Theodoret, *Expl.* 1.69C.

²¹⁶ Cf. Gregory, *Hom.* 12, 353: “Ἀδελφιδός μου παρήλθεν, οὐ καταλιπὼν τὴν ἐπομένην αὐτῷ ψυχὴν ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐφελκόμενος”.

²¹⁷ Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113C.

²¹⁸ Cf. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Epistulae*, 93 [in SC 98, pg 244]: “Ῥάδιον μὲν γὰρ ἦν τῷ τῶν ὄλων Θεῷ νεῦσαι καὶ λῦσαι τὰ σκυθρωπά: ἀλλ’ ἀναβάλλεται καὶ τῶν πολεμουμένων τὴν ἀνδρείαν ἐπιδεικνύς καὶ ὑμῖν ἀφορμὰς εἰς ὠφέλειαν παρέχων” (it is easy for the God of all to nod and dissolve the sorrow; but he postpones, manifesting the courage of the afflicted and providing a cause of edification for us).

²¹⁹ Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113A. Cf. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 31.17: “Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπαμόνοντος τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ τῆ μακροθυμῆς γυμνάζοντος, καὶ συγχωροῦντος δέχεσθαι τῆς ἀδικίας τὰς προσβολάς, ὁμοίως διέμεινεν ἀγαπῶν” (and with God’s assistance, exercising his long-suffering allowing to accept the afflictions of injustice, he remained in the same love). Cf. Procopius of Gaza, *Fragmenta*, PG 87, 1773D: “ὁδύνη σοι ἐπέλθη σαρκός, κατὰ συγχώρεσιν ἐμὴν γίνωσκε τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐπισυμβαίνειν σοι· ἵνα ἢ πρὸς ἐμὲ ἀγάπη πάσι κατὰδηλος γινεται, μὴ ἐνδιδοῦσης τοῖς πειρασμοῖς, καὶ οὐχὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ εἶναι πρόνοιαν ἐπὶ πάντα διήκουσαν” (when bodily distress might come upon you, know that this happens to you according to my consent. So that your love for me might become apparent to everyone, not giving in to temptations, and not because there is no providence extending over everything).

²²⁰ Theodoret, *De Providentia*, PG 83, 556-773.

²²¹ Note also the presence of τῆς φυγῆς τὴν οἰκονομίαν in the text. Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113C.

to profit from the experience: “devising benefit from all quarters for his followers”.²²²

iii) Theodoret had developed the motif of divine consent within a Christological context. The fact that --unlike the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the *Lausiac History*-- Theodoret did not mention this motif in his *Historia Religiosa*, indicates that the latter work was not composed as a book including “ascetical” teachings.²²³ In his Christological works, like Cyril, Theodoret had highlighted the fact that Christ’s divinity permitted his humanity to experience natural human passions.²²⁴ That is, it is only through divine intervention that humanity was subjected -or not- to natural human passions, such as thirst. Due to the fact that the date of exegetical composition on the *Song* remains debatable, it is not clear whether Theodoret had introduced the notion of divine permission into an anthropological context which he later on applied to his Christology or *vice versa*.²²⁵ Origen had already introduced the notion of divine consent with regard to trials.²²⁶ In the *Lausiac History*²²⁷ and the *Spiritual Homilies* of Macarius,²²⁸ we encounter a developed notion of divine consent with regard to trials (παραχώρησις-συγχώρησις). It seems that, from an anthropological context, the notion was adapted in order to be exploited in the Christological debates of late antiquity.²²⁹

²²² Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113A: “πανταχόθεν ὠφέλειαν τοῖς θιασώταις μηχανώμενος”. Cf. Theodoret, *EpP.* PG 82, 449: “[reflecting on 2 Cor. 12:7] τούτου γὰρ δὴ χάριν, φησὶ, τῆς ἐμῆς ὁ Δεσπότης προμηθοῦμενος ὠφελείας, τοὺς παντοδαπούς μοι συνεκλήρωσε πειρασμούς” (for this reason, he says, the Lord devising for my benefit, he chose the lot for me of various temptations).

²²³ Theodoret did not related divine *paideia* to trials or self-determination in his *Historia Religiosa*. In this latter work, divine *paideia* meant learning of the scriptures.

²²⁴ Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *De Incarnatione Domini*, PG 75, 1457C. Cf. Cyril, *De Sancta Trinitate*, PG 75, 1033B-C.

²²⁵ There is not much evidence in Theodoret’s work in this matter. Scholars tend to support one position or the other according to their disposition towards Theodoret’s Christology. For scholars supporting that Theodoret had always maintained an Orthodox theology, his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* belonged to an early stage of his career as an exegete (e.g. Guinot). For those scholars that hold that Theodoret was tamed in Chalcedon, the book was one of his latest compositions where he had the chance to present his Chalcedonian Orthodoxy for fear of being deposed from his office (e.g. Richard and Bardy). Cf. J. N. Guinot, ‘La Christologie de Théodore de Cyr’, 256-272. Elliott, *Christology*, 34-35. Pásztori-Kupán has suggested of a middle solution placing the composition during the “cold war years” between Ephesus (A.D. 431) and Chalcedon (A.D. 451). Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*, 18.

²²⁶ Origen, *Fragmenta in Lucam* (in *catenis*), 192 [number of fragments in GCS 49].

²²⁷ Palladius, *Laus.* 47 [reference to *vita*].

²²⁸ Theodoret would have known Macarius as part of the Egyptian desert tradition. It is only in recent years that scholars established the Syriac ambience of the Macarian spiritual corpus. For a review of the literature see: M. Plested, *The Macarian Legacy: The Place of Macarius-Symeon in the Eastern Christian Tradition*, OxThM (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

²²⁹ In his *Historia Religiosa*, Theodoret did not refer to any technical ascetical terms such as: *temptations*, *pride* and *listlessness*. Vööbus supported the peculiar character of Syrian asceticism

The next step that Theodoret took was to introduce the scriptural images of Paul and Elijah.²³⁰ Theodoret did not seem to distinguish between the two scriptural figures and their causes of abandonment: both figures had undergone abandonment. Theodoret maintained his line of reasoning: God did not intervene to deliver his devotee from his afflictions. Paul had prayed to be spared from his experience. But God did not remove the “thorn in the flesh”; “and Paul pleads, but he is not granted”.²³¹ Elijah “is looking for the defender”.²³² However, “he [i.e. God] abandons him for a while to be exercised through fear”.²³³ Theodoret did not discern any variations between the motif of abandonment as it had appeared in Ps 12:2 and its occurrence in 2 Cor. 12:7-9 and 1Kgs 19:4; at least not explicitly.

However, one could discern such a distinction when taking into account the way in which Theodoret introduced the aftermath of the experience. Paul was granted understanding about the nature of divine grace: “for [Paul], having being taught what he did not know, he accepts with pleasure not to be granted what he had asked for”.²³⁴ The ascetical literature had already related the figure of Paul to a precautionary level of abandonment: God prevented the presence of *pride* in Paul.²³⁵ Theodoret had followed such an understanding of Paul’s experience in his exegetical work on Paul’s epistles.²³⁶ However, in his *In Canticum*, he shifted his position: Paul was taught about the role of weakness. It is through weakness –in terms of trials- that God reinforced the soul. The Pauline passage implies a precautionary action on God’s behalf. But Theodoret did not elaborate on this matter. Yet, in citing 2 Cor. 12:7, he supported this point. Thus, Paul was taught about divine pedagogy in terms of God’s acting in a precautionary way, highlighting the presence of human weakness.

which, according to him, Macarius expressed in his spiritual corpus. Theodoret’s editors of the *Historia Religiosa* for the CS series, alongside Cavinet, commented on ascetical ideals that Theodoret introduced in his *Historia*. Yet, in his ascetical biographies, there was no reference to what made Syrian asceticism distinct from Egyptian asceticism. Either Theodoret composed his work at an early stage, before developing his vocabulary in his exegetical works; or, he idealised the image of the Syrian ascetics to such an extent that they carried nothing of what defines asceticism in technical terms (*pride*-temptations). This latter position was supported by Urbainczyk. See Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*.

²³⁰ Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113B.

²³¹ *Op. cit.*: “καὶ παρακαλεῖ Παῦλος, καὶ οὐ τυγχάνει”.

²³² *Op. cit.*: “ζητεῖ δὲ τὸν ἐπικουρον”.

²³³ *Op. cit.*: “καταλιπὼν αὐτὸν πρὸς ὀλίγον ἐγγυμνασθῆναι τῷ φόβῳ”.

²³⁴ *Op. cit.*: “διδασκόμενος ὁ ἡγνόει, μεθ’ ἡδονῆς τὸ μὴ λαβεῖν ἃ ἤτηκε δέχεται”.

²³⁵ Palladius, *Laus.* 47.

²³⁶ Theodoret, *EpP.* PG 82, 449: “τὸ φρόνημα χαλινῶν” ([God] curbs arrogance).

As it was mentioned, without pointing out that he was shifting his line of reasoning, Theodoret brought into play Elijah's case:

[God] appears to him and as though ignorant asks the reason for the flight, not to mock him but to bring out the plan behind the flight, and to teach him, as one with a human nature and the victim of its passions, to make allowances.²³⁷

Theodoret emphasised that God did not chastise Elijah. It is easy to discern in the last lines the notion that the experience of abandonment involved a sort of knowledge (*gnosis*) with regard to human nature. Indeed, in the case of Paul, Theodoret implied that such knowledge was communicated through the experience. Also, Theodoret introduced the notion of *instruction* in vigorous terms: “ὡς ἀγνοῶν πυνθάνεται, διδάσκων, παιδεύων”. But what was the content of such an instruction?

[God] appears to him and as though ignorant asks the reason for the flight, not to mock him but to bring out the plan behind the flight, and to teach him, as one with a human nature and the victim of its passions, to make allowances.²³⁸

When comparing between his exegetical work *In Canticum*, and his *Quaestiones in Libros Regnorum*²³⁹ with regard to 1 Kgs 19:5, it becomes evident that Theodoret knew of an anthropological position that could have brought his exegesis closer to the ascetical argument. What stands at the core of his exegesis is the notion of *gnosis* of human weakness. In the latter work, Elijah's experience was identical to Paul:

In order not to be puffed up by arrogance due to the wonder-working, grace granted that cowardice would be introduced to his nature, so that he might know his own weakness.²⁴⁰

Theodoret introduced a precautionary level at which the soul had felt divine *paideia*. What is of interest is the last sentence: “he might know his own weakness”. Origen had already argued that, through the experience, the soul gained knowledge of her

²³⁷ Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.113C: “ἐπιφαίνεται αὐτῷ, καὶ ὡς ἀγνοῶν πυνθάνεται τῆς φυγῆς τὴν αἰτίαν, οὐκ ἐπιταθάζων αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ διδάσκων τῆς φυγῆς τὴν οἰκονομίαν, καὶ παιδεύων εἶναι συγγνώμονα, ἀνθρωπεῖαν φύσιν περικείμενον, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ταύτης παθῶν πολεμούμενον” [trans. Hill on pg. 69].

²³⁸ It needs to be noted that the grammatical expressions that Theodoret used had also appeared in Theodoret's work within a Christological context. The expression referred to Christ who put on humanity. The explication “ὑπὸ τῶν ταύτης παθῶν πολεμούμενον” was a device to argue the consubstantiality of Christ's humanity with the rest of the human race. Cf. Theodoret, *Expl.* 3.141A. Theodoret did not explicitly see Elijah as a type of Christ. However, it could not be coincidental that this is the first time that Theodoret appropriated the expression “ἀνθρωπεῖαν φύσιν περικείμενον” outside of an explicit Christological context. Cf. Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Eranistes*, 90 [pg 60 in FOTC 106]. *Ibid.*, 205 [pg 196]: “ὁ ποιητῆς ἑκατέραν δυναστεῖαν καταλῦσαι θελήσας τὴν ὑπὸ τούτων πολεμουμένην ἀνέλαβε φύσιν” (desiring to destroy both powers [i.e. death and the devil], the creator assumed nature that was afflicted by them).

²³⁹ Cf. Theodoret, *EpP.* PG 82, 449.

²⁴⁰ Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Quaestiones in Libros iii Regnorum*, 59 [PG 80, 733A]: “Ἴνα γὰρ μὴ τῆς θαυματουργίας τὸ μέγεθος ἐπάρη τὸ φρόνημα, ἐνδεδῶκεν ἡ χάρις φύσει τὴν δειλίαν εἰσδέξασθαι, ἵνα ἐπιγνῶ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀσθένειαν”.

origin. Theodoret indicated that it was human weakness that was the content of such *gnosis*. It is important to mention, in advance, Hausherr's observation that, for Evagrius, *gnosis* of human weakness remained at the summit of spiritual life and it is the highest fruit of divine abandonment. Macarius had made the same point.

It is certain that Theodoret did not mean his reader to discern such a technical observation in his *In Canticum*.²⁴¹ Theodoret was still addressing *natural passions* such as "cowardice". What needs to be concluded at this point is the fact that, apparently, Theodoret introduced the notion of divine abandonment as a precaution related to the scriptural image of Paul. He only implied the presence of *pride* within the soul. There is no evidence that Theodoret was aware of Paphnutius' discourse in the *Lausiac History*. In advance, we will note that: i) Theodoret was missing a clear distinction between events with regard to divine *consent* and *will*; and, ii) he did not refer to *pride* explicitly. These are the two points that Paphnutius had argued. Theodoret did not associate divine abandonment with chastisement. In this matter, he followed Origen and Gregory. But this is due more to the fact that he followed the biblical narrative than to a firm anthropological theory as in Gregory's case. The fact remains that, at the summit of spiritual perfection, Theodoret discerned a distressful condition that caught the soul by surprise.

Theodoret provided another context in which he discussed the motif of divine abandonment. This time his exegesis came closer to the Gregorian interpretation. The experience of abandonment was related to trials. Yet its aftermath was felt at an intellectual level: the soul was introduced to the notion of divine incomprehensibility.²⁴² Theodoret followed Gregory in arguing the distinction between uncreated God and creation (intelligible-material).²⁴³ The soul had left behind all material and intelligible reality in order to conceive that God was

²⁴¹ Theodoret was following the biblical narrative where God had fed Elijah in the desert, redeeming his hunger. Cf. 1 Kgs 19:5-8. In this sense, the term "natural passions" was an allusion to 1 Kgs 19:5-6 and addressed natural passions --distinct from the Evagrian/Macarian content of the word *passions* that described the inner motions of the soul.

²⁴² Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.116A-D.

²⁴³ Theodoret, *op. cit.*: "Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀγγέλοις ἀκατάληπτος ὁ νυμφίος τὴν οὐσίαν ἐστὶ... μὴδὲ τούτοις αὐτὸν εἶναι καταληπτὸν, κτιστοῖς οὐσι τὸν ἄκτιστον... ὡς βραχὺ, διὰ μόνον τὸ κτιστὸν νῶ καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀγγελικὴν φύσιν διέβην, ἵνα τὸν ἄκτιστον εὕρω τὸν ἀγαπητὸν μου, ὡς ἐβεργέτην μου, πίστει μόνῃ κατέσχον αὐτόν" (For the groom is incomprehensible in his nature to the holy angels... for he is not conceivable to them (angels), the uncreated to the created... only through the created nous, shortly, having passed beyond the angelic nature to find the uncreated, my beloved, I conceive him only through faith as my benefactor).

incomprehensible.²⁴⁴ Unlike Gregory, Theodoret did not introduce the notion of divine infinity. Despite the fact that God was beyond comprehension, he indicated that it is within the life of the Church that the soul has been united to God. Thus, Theodoret did not argue about the soul's ceaseless quest for the divine. He exploited the Gregorian notion of the incarnation and the presence of the divine image within the soul to argue --in more vigorous terms than Gregory-- that the soul was truly united to God.

In Sol 5:2 the bride had claimed that her heart was vigilant.²⁴⁵ However, she did not hurry to open the door to her groom.²⁴⁶ Analysing this episode, Theodoret was carried away by the text: on the one hand, he indicated that the soul was vigilant.²⁴⁷ On the other hand, he thought that the soul fell into a state of slothfulness (ὄκνος).²⁴⁸ Apparently, this discrepancy was due to Theodoret's intention to remain loyal to the biblical text.

Unlike Gregory, who had remained coherent in his exegesis on the biblical episode in Sol 5:3, Theodoret shifted his interpretation. He placed the theme of *desire* and *eros* at the core of his argument.²⁴⁹ But, most importantly, he also introduced the notion of *slothfulness* (ὄκνος).²⁵⁰ The theme of *slothfulness* appeared

²⁴⁴ Note the use of *πίστει μόνῃ* in Theodoret's text and compare it to Laird's argument with regard to the importance of faith: part of the divine is graspable by means of faith. Theodoret, *Expl.* 2.116C. Cf. Gregory, *Hom.* 3, 87: "διὰ μόνῃς πίστεως εἰσοικίζειν ἐν ἑαυτῇ λέγει δεῖν τὴν πάντα νοῦν ὑπερέχουσαν φύσιν" (it is proper to introduce into herself the nature that lays beyond every perception through faith alone). See Laird, *The Grasp of Faith*, 104.

²⁴⁵ Sol 5:2: "Ἐγὼ καθεύδω, καὶ ἡ καρδία μου ἀγρυπνεῖ" (I am sleeping, but my heart is vigilant).

²⁴⁶ Sol 5:3: "Ἐξεδυσάμην τὸν χιτῶνά μου, πῶς ἐνδύσωμαι αὐτόν; ἐνιψάμην τοὺς πόδας μου, πῶς μολυνῶ αὐτούς;" (I have put off my garment, how could I put it on? I have washed my feet, how could I defile them?).

²⁴⁷ Theodoret, *Expl.* 3.149B: "κατὰ διάνοιαν ἐγρήγορα, καὶ τὸν τῆς ῥαθυμίας ὕπνον οὐ καταδέχομαι, τοῦ νυμφίου τὴν παρουσίαν προσμένουσα" (I am vigilant in my mind, and I have not accepted the sleep of listlessness, anticipating the presence of the groom).

²⁴⁸ Theodoret, *Expl.* 3.152B: "Διδασκόμεθα ἐντεῦθεν, ὅσῃν τίκτει βλάβην, καὶ ὅσον ἐπιφέρει πόνον τοῖς χρωμένοις ὁ ὄκνος" (from that, we are taught what great is the blame and what great is the toil slothfulness brings to him who succeeds to it).

²⁴⁹ Theodoret, *op. cit.*: "Καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀνεβάλλετο ἐκείναις ταῖς προφάσεσι χρησαμένη, ἐτέρως αὐτὴν ὁ νυμφίος διεγείρει" (the groom stirs up her desire alternatively; because, she has postponed [opening by] using such excuses). Theodoret, *Expl.*, 3.153A: "θερμαίνει δὲ αὐτῆς καὶ πυρσεύει τὸν ἔρωτα" (he heats up and inflames her *eros*). The presence of *eros* and *desire* (πόθος) are indications of Theodoret's exegetical debt to Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. The fact that divine abandonment was related to desire for the divine, however, shows that Theodoret was primarily working on the position of the latter exegete.

²⁵⁰ He 12:1. Cf. Gregory, *Beat.* 3.98.24.

at the opening and closing lines of his exegesis.²⁵¹ Despite his assertion that the soul was vigilant, Theodoret indicated that the soul fell into *slothfulness*. Thus, through the experience of abandonment, God corrected the soul's *slothfulness*. This time, the cause of abandonment seems to be clear: the soul's lack of zeal. However, Theodoret was cautious not to introduce a reading that would have suggested the soul's chastisement. By placing *desire* at the heart of the episode, Theodoret commented that, through abandonment, the groom had intended to stir up the soul's *desire*. Thus, Theodoret shifted his focus from the soul to God: God was working on many levels to attract the soul.

The introduction of *slothfulness* was an exegetical device rather than anything else (e.g. Evagrian *acedia*): Theodoret did not introduce the term in a coherent anthropology that had discussed *slothfulness* as a foe for spiritual perfection. The latter position was part of the argument in the ascetical literature. For instance, Macarius and Evagrius had defined slothfulness as a sort of spiritual laxity.²⁵² Evagrius had favoured the term *acedia* that introduced the notion of spiritual laxity at the summit of spiritual progress. Through trials, God exercised the soul, urging her to spiritual warfare. Most importantly, Evagrius had connected *acedia* to demonic presence.²⁵³ In Macarius and Evagrius, *acedia* was introduced within a certain anthropological context that defined spiritual life as the warfare between laxity and spiritual effort. Theodoret did not reflect on such a position. He was aware of the term *acedia*, but only as part of the biblical vocabulary.²⁵⁴ He did not use it in his *Historia Religiosa*.²⁵⁵ Theodoret did not integrate the notion of spiritual laxity in his spirituality. The only instance where the term clearly appeared in an anthropological context was in his *Eranistes*: he indicated that *ὄκνος* refers to the natural bond

²⁵¹ Theodoret, *Expl.* 3.153C: “Διδασκόμεθα τοίνυν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων, πάντα ὄκνον ἀποθέσθαι, καὶ τῷ νυμφίῳ κρούοντι παραντίκα ἀνοίγειν” (so, we are taught, from what has been said, to put away slothfulness, and open immediately when the groom knocks).

²⁵² Macarius had related *ὄκνος* as a cause of ethical lapsing from perfection. Cf. Macarius, *Hom.* 15.16 [all reference in PTS 4]. Evagrius had linked it to *acedia*. Evagrius, *De Vitiis quae Opposita sunt Virtutibus*, 4 [PG 79, 1144]. See G. Bunge, *Akèdia: La doctrine spirituelle d'Évagre le Pontique sur l'acédie*, Spiritualité Orientale 52 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1991).

²⁵³ Bunge, *Akèdia*.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Is 61:3. Ps 60:3. Ps 101:1.

²⁵⁵ The theme of *acedia* had appeared in his other works. Theodoret had used it in its classical form. Thus, it had taken the meaning of “hesitating” or “postponing” a task, and being “slothful”. In its latter meaning, the motif had not appeared in a spiritual-anthropological context addressing the soul's spiritual struggles. For Theodoret, *slothfulness* was a natural passion, as opposed to Evagrius' slothfulness that was related to the work of the demon of *acedia*. Whenever the motif had carried the meaning of being slothful, it was due to Theodoret's following the biblical text. Cf. Theodoret, *EpP.* PG 82, 189. Cf. Ro 12:11. Theodoretus, *Interpretatio in Psalmos*, PG 80, 1325; 1676 and also 1829.

between soul and the present life that God implanted into the soul.²⁵⁶ All the above evidence suffices to suggest that the presence of the term *slothfulness* was accidental in his work. It appeared due to Theodoret's discerning this motif in the bride's hesitation to listen to the groom's calling zealously. Theodoret did not insist any further on this matter. We need to remember that, despite the fact that Theodoret had introduced the soul's *slothfulness* (ὄκνος), the experience of abandonment remained unlinked to sin and chastisement. Theodoret introduced a semi-Gregorian argument by shifting his exegetical interest immediately to the training of *desire*.

d. Nilus of Ancyra: the ascetical features

It has been suggested by Guérard that, according to internal and external evidence, Nilus of Ancyra was the author of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, and also, of other ascetical writings (e.g. *Ascetical Discourse*).²⁵⁷ According to Guérard, Nilus was an ascetic himself.²⁵⁸ So, why did Nilus compose his only commentary on the *Song of Songs*? Evidence from his writings supports the fact that Nilus knew the exegetical Evagrian corpus.²⁵⁹ The very fact that Nilus composed a work on the *Song* raises the question about the degree to which Nilus envisaged his work as completing Evagrian exegesis on the trinity of wisdom literature: *Ecclesiastes*, *Proverbs* and *Song of Songs*.²⁶⁰ Guérard opted for the position that Evagrius was, most likely, his inspiration.²⁶¹ However, her position overlooks the

²⁵⁶ Cf. Theodoret, *Eranistes*, 245 [pg 243 in FOTC 106]. In this instance, Theodoret addressed Christ's shrinking back in Gethsemane.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Guérard's introduction in Nil D'Ancyre, *Commentaire sur le Cantique*, 25. For a list of his writings see *ibid*, 100.

²⁵⁸ For the problem of the identity of Nilus see *ibid*, 16-25.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 42.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 43. Evagrius had followed the Origenist position about the trinity of wisdom literature that had brought the soul from practical to natural contemplation, and then, divine contemplation. Evagrius, *Prov.* 22.20 (247). Cf. Origen, *Com.* Prologus.3.41. Indeed, Evagrius composed commentaries on *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs* –and even on *Job* (surviving in Niceta's *catena*). It seems that death stopped him from composing a work on the *Song of Songs*. Macarius also had appreciated the content of the *Song* for the ascetic soul. He alluded to the *Song* with regard to spiritual perfection. See Macarius, *Typs.* 3.2 [edition in TU 72] --citing Sol 2:10; 3.3 --citing Sol 2:6; and 7.5 – citing Sol 2:5). The fact that Macarius was the only ascetical author of late antiquity to make extensive use of the *Song of Songs* needs to be viewed in connection to Vööbus' observation that the imagery of Christ as the "Bridegroom" was peculiar to Syrian theology from an early stage. Of course, his observation presupposed a Syriac ambience for the composition of the Macarian corpus. See Vööbus, 'The Fifty Spiritual Homilies', in *History of Asceticism*, 3/55. Idem, *On the Historical Importance of the Legacy of Pseudo-Macarius: New Observations about its Syriac Provenance*, Estonian Theological Society in Exile 23 (Stockholm: Etse, 1972).

²⁶¹ Nil, *Commentaire sur le Cantique*, 43.

presence of Didymos' exegetical influence on Nilus.²⁶² Origen's trinity of wisdom literature had also appeared in the exegesis of the Alexandrian scholar. Unlike Evagrius, Didymos had interpreted the three books of wisdom literature, including the *Song of Songs*.²⁶³ It is certain that Nilus was influenced by a broader Origenist appreciation of the wisdom literature that was common in Didymos and Evagrius. Thus, it is difficult to know for certain if Nilus completed the Evagrian or Didymian trilogy on the wisdom literature. However, if we turn to internal evidence in his *In Canticum*, then it becomes apparent that Nilus incorporated Evagrian anthropology and spirituality in his work. Hence, whatever the cause of his motivation, in his commentary, among other traditions, Nilus reflected on Evagrian ascetical positions with regard to Christian spirituality and asceticism.²⁶⁴

Nilus of Ancyra presented a remarkable coherency when interpreting the episodes in Sol 3:1 and Sol 5:2 which was due to his anthropological perspective. Both times, he departed from the biblical narrative. Part of his coherency is the fact that he discerned the motif of *slothfulness* (ραθυμία) behind the biblical episodes. As it will be illustrated, unlike the biblical text and his exegetical predecessors (Origen, Gregory, Theodoret), Nilus located the cause of divine abandonment within the soul.

Commenting on Sol 3:2-3, Nilus indicated that the episode occurred while the soul was on her way to perfection, following after the groom.²⁶⁵ What lies behind his exegesis is an Evagrian anthropology that, unlike Gregory and Theodoret, had stressed the soul's role in spiritual life. It is remarkable that, in the two latter exegetes, the soul was advancing in spiritual life without any hindrance. Even Theodoret's *pride* was only a potential foe that was prevented by divine *paideia*. Nilus employed a different stand: the soul was not secured in her spiritual journey. Nilus brought together divine abandonment and spiritual laxity:

When you seek, is not possible to find the desired-one in comfort (for asceticism for goods fights listlessness)... [the soul] I thought it was light and easy to acquire the

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 41-42. According to Guérard, Nilus employed Didymos' Christology and also his biblical exegesis.

²⁶³ Didymos was the only known author, after Origen, that completed a commentary on each book of the wisdom literature. For a fragment in his *Commentary on the Song* see J. Meursius, *Eusebii, Polychronii, Pselli in Canticum Canticorum Expositiones Graece* (Lugduni: Bataurum, 1617).

²⁶⁴ Nilus was influenced from the liturgical tradition of the early Church (Cyril of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom), the Christological and exegetical positions of Athanasius and Didymos the blind, and the pagan philosophy and culture of classical and late antiquity. See Guérard, 'La Culture de l'Auteur', in Nil, *Commentaire sur le Cantique*, 38-47.

²⁶⁵ Nilus, *Com.* 32.1.100.

virtue and be similar to the wisdom, and I was looking for it without effort, carelessly and lightly, resting on the bodily (matters) like a bed.²⁶⁶

Spiritual perfection required the soul's active participation. We need to view this exegetical line within the context of arguing the need for spiritual efforts in the ascetical tradition. Characteristically, Nilus did not refer to *praxis* but, *ascesis*, a stronger indication of the soul's efforts which connotes ethical purification.²⁶⁷ As Guérard noted, Nilus accommodated the Evagrian notion of *praxis* as the means by which the soul cleansed her *concupiscence* (ἐπιθυμία) and “purified the passionate part of the soul”.²⁶⁸ *Ascesis* was the only means to virtue. Nilus envisaged virtues as the basis on which the soul was established in order to advance spiritually. The above observations would suffice to indicate that Nilus introduced divine abandonment as means of correction, but not chastisement. Yet, Nilus brought into play the notion of the soul's *satiety* (κόρος). In her spiritual journey, the soul was not secure. This was due to the possibility of being fed up, overlooking spiritual efforts. This position placed Nilus within an Evagrian anthropological milieu. Nilus did not think of *satiety* as a cosmological principle that caused the soul's original fall from divine contemplation. He dismissed Evagrian speculation and only maintained the anthropological implications of Evagrian thought.²⁶⁹ Nilus pinpointed the presence of *κόρος* within the acquisition of virtues:

Many, when they reach their pursuit, either because of becoming fed up with it after some time or, because of turning away their disposition to something else, they stand aloof and becoming neglectful, after a little while, they fall from the perfect state.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Nilus, *Com.* 32.3.100: “οὐκ ἔστι μετὰ ἀναπαύσεως ζητοῦντα τὸν ποθοῦμενον εὐρεῖν (ἀσκήσει γὰρ τῶν καλῶν ῥαστώνη πολέμιον)... ἐνόμισα κοῦφον εἶναι καὶ εὐχερὲς τὸ κτήσασθαι τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν οικειώσασθαι καὶ ἐζήτουν οὐ μετὰ πόνου, ἀλλ’ ἀνειμένως καὶ ῥαθύμως, καὶ τοῖς σωματικοῖς ὡς κλινῇ ἐπαναπαυομένη”.

²⁶⁷ Nilus, *Com.* 48.6.140. V. Messana, ‘Πράξις and Θεωρία chez Nil d’Ancyre’, *SP* 18/2, 235-241.

²⁶⁸ Nil, *Commentaire sur le Cantique*, 80.

²⁶⁹ We need to note that the term “Evagrian thought” indicates an anthropology that dealt with spiritual life from the soul's point of view and incorporated a firm notion of the soul's potential backsliding. It refers to a broad tradition of late antiquity that needs not be identified only with the work of Evagrius. For instance, Macarius had also maintained the same notion of the soul's potential lapse even at a mature spiritual level. Thus, the term “Evagrian” is meant to juxtapose the idea of backsliding to the notion of unhindered spiritual ascension in Athanasian and Cappadocian thought.

²⁷⁰ Nilus, *Com.* 32.16.102: “οἱ μὲν γὰρ πολλοί, ὅταν φθάσωσιν ἐπὶ τὸ σπουδαζόμενον, ἢ κόρον λαβόντες αὐτοῦ τῷ χρόνῳ ἢ περὶ ἕτερα τὴν προθυμίαν ἀποκλίναντες ἀφίστανται καὶ μικρὸν ἀμελήσαντες ἐκπίπτουσιν τῆς ἀρίστης ἐξεως”.

Despite the fact that Nilus did not attribute satiety to the biblical bride, nevertheless, his position that the soul became neglectful²⁷¹ needs to be viewed in close connection to the presence of satiety. The soul fell into laxity; she was idle. Thus, divine abandonment healed her laxity and stirred up her *desire* for the divine. Nilus was the first commentator to connect divine abandonment with a negative attribute within the soul. Theodoret had introduced abandonment as a precaution. Nilus also brought into play the notion of abandonment as chastising, i.e. healing the soul's negative properties.

This latter position becomes more apparent from what follows. Even though the soul felt the urgency to correct her perception of spiritual effort (laxity-*ascesis*) and, despite the fact that she was working on the virtues, the groom remained hidden. Nilus was of one mind with Macarius and Evagrius that, in fact, the acquisition of virtue hides a parasite, i.e., *pride*:

Having left the bed to conduct my pursuit through deeds, but even this did not lead me to find it. Though it is proper to hide the toil when working on the virtues, I (i.e. the soul) was manifesting it (i.e. effort) making it public in the squares and the market places hunting after the praise of men.²⁷²

Nilus attributed the soul's desire to manifest her spiritual toil to her being puffed up. *Pride* originated by her virtues. The word *pride* occurred several times in his work either in the form *κενοδοξία* or *φιλοδοξία*.²⁷³ The parallel between Nilus' *In Canticum*²⁷⁴ and Evagrius' *De Octo Spiritibus Malitiae*²⁷⁵ is striking.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ Nilus, *Com.* 32.2-3.100

²⁷² Nilus, *Com.* 32.6.100-101: “καταλιπούσα τὴν κλίνην ἐπὶ τὸ δ' ἔργων ποιήσασθαι τὴν ζητήσιν, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τοῦτό με πρὸς τὴν εὐρεσίαν ὠδήγησεν. δεόν γάρ ἐργαζομένην τὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς κρύψαι τὸν πόνον, ἐπιδεικτικῶσα τοῦτον ἐδημοσίεον ἐν πλατείαις καὶ ἐν ἀγοραῖς, τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔπαινον θηρωμένη”.

²⁷³ Nilus, *Com.* 12.18.36; 12.20.36; 29.4.90; 32.7.101; 38.4.120.

²⁷⁴ Nilus, *Com.* 12.18-19.36: “καλῶς ὁ προφήτης τὴν κενοδοξίαν ἀπόδεσμον εἶπεν τετραπημένον (“ὁ συνάγων γάρ”, φησί, “τοὺς μισθοὺς συνήγαγεν εἰς ἀπόδεσμον τετραπημένον”), ἀπόδεσμον μὲν τὴν πράξιν, ὁππὴν δὲ τὸν σκοπὸν τῆς δόξης εἰρηκῶς” (correctly, the prophet called *pride* a bag full of holes, ‘for he that gathers’, he says, ‘gathers his reward to a bag full of holes’, the bag is the *praxis* and he called hole the disposition of glory). Cf. Hg 1:6. Guérard noticed the role of this biblical passage in Nilus' *In Canticum* and his other ascetical works. See, Nil D'Ancyre, *Commentaire sur le Cantique*, 25.

²⁷⁵ Evagrius, *De Octo*, 15 [PG 79, 1160D]: “Βαλάντιον τετραπημένον οὐ φυλάττει τὸ βληθὲν, καὶ κενοδοξία ἀπόλλυσι μισθοὺς ἀρετῶν” (A pouch full of holes does not keep what was put in it, and *pride* loses the reward of the virtues).

²⁷⁶ Rosenbaum highlighted the parallel text of Evagrius. See, Nilus von Ancyra, *Kommentar zum Hohelied*, H. U. Rosenbaum (ed.), PTS 57 (2004), 36-37 (in the critical apparatus). The Greek manuscript tradition attributed the *De Octo Spiritibus* to Nilus of Ancyra. It is an indication of the uniformity between his work and Evagrian ascetical thought. See Vöðbus, *History of Asceticism*, 3/146.

Evagrius had indicated that the proud soul asked for human praise at public places (πλατεῖαι).²⁷⁷ Nilus applied this image to the biblical bride.²⁷⁸ In doing this, Nilus had followed the biblical narrative. However, the fact that Nilus was the only commentator to link the bride's appearance at public places to *pride* was a strong indication that he also had Evagrius' afore-mentioned passage in his mind.

In his *Narratio*, Nilus had defined *pride* as "counting on one's self". As in the case of Macarius and Evagrius, Nilus had emphasised that the soul dismissed the need for divine assistance, thinking that spiritual progress was her own achievement.²⁷⁹ In the *In Canticum*, Nilus indicated that *pride* had sprung from the soul's spiritual advancement: the soul that realised the presence of virtues within her became puffed up.²⁸⁰

Nilus discerned a deeper reason that led the soul to *pride*. He implied that the soul's disposition was corrupted. The reason that she desired to acquire the virtues was not related to her *desire* for the divine. She was looking for human appraisal. Nilus' position was reminiscent of Paphnutius' discourse in the *Historia Lausiaca*. As will be discussed later, Paphnutius had distinguished between *disposition* (πρόθεσις) and *praxis* (πράξις). A virtuous action is taking place. However, the disposition, i.e. the cause that leads to this action, might be corrupted. Nilus is of one mind with Paphnutius: the bride (i.e. the soul) was working on the virtues. Yet, her disposition was corrupted since what she was really after was public praise.

Nilus' thought on divine abandonment shared common themes with Evagrian thought: divine abandonment was part of divine *paideia* devised to "chastise" the soul from her negative attributes of *pride* and *laxity*. The term "abandonment" might not have appeared in his commentary. Yet, he has communicated the ascetical message for spiritual effort and vigilance against *pride* and *laxity*.

Nilus' exegesis on Sol 5:4 followed the same line of reasoning. Divine abandonment was introduced as a form of chastising the soul's negative attributes.

²⁷⁷ Evagrius, *De Octo*, 16 [PG 79, 1161A]: "Ἐν πλατεῖαις προσεύχεσθαι συμβουλεύει κενοδοξία" (*pride* instructs us to pray in public places). Cf. Mt 6:5. Evagrius had paraphrased the Matthean passage. Nilus followed Evagrius in relating *public places* to displaying virtue and being *prideful*. He found the imagery of Sol 3:2 as appropriate to apply this Evagrian connection to his biblical exegesis.

²⁷⁸ Nilus, *Com.* 32.6.100-101.

²⁷⁹ Nilus of Ancyra, *Narratio*, 3.15: "τὸν συνεργὸν τὸν καλῶν ἀθετοῦσα θεὸν καὶ ἑαυτῇ τῶν κατορθωμάτων ἐπιγράφουσα τὴν δύναμιν" (disregarding God, the colleague in good, she claims credit of the power of what is achieved for herself).

²⁸⁰ Nilus, *Com.* 29.4.90.

The only difference is that, here, Nilus was explicit about the connection between abandonment and chastisement.²⁸¹

[The soul] suffers because she did not obey to the word zealously to be shown that the one who is most precious to God, being after comforts and resting, is despised and receives the experience of punishment. For, ‘he [i.e. God] has sent’, it is said, ‘the hand that chastises the disobedient’.²⁸²

It seems that Nilus had addressed his commentary to ascetics. For, he was at pains to exhort to spiritual vigilance and highlight the importance of ethical effort. In his exegesis, the bride was never secure in her ascension to the divine. Nilus did not present the episodes of the *Song* in the Gregorian notion of the *ακολουθία* of the text. Moreover, his exegesis was not coherent, mixing up the bride as an ascetical figure and already acquainted with the groom. Nilus made his way through the commentary by introducing elements of ethical edification wherever he felt it more appropriate.

²⁸¹ Cf. Nilus, *Com.* 81.3-4.198-199.

²⁸² Nilus, *Com.* 57.1-2.158: “πάσχει ἔπει μὴ προθύμως ὑπήκουσε τῷ λόγῳ, ἵνα δευχθῆ ὅτι ὁ πολυτίμιος θεῶ ἀνεσιν διώκων καὶ ἀναπειπωκῶς καταφρονεῖται καὶ τιμωρίας πείραν λαμβάνει. ἀπέστειλεν γάρ, φησὶν, τὴν παιδεύουσαν τοὺς ἀπειθεῖς χεῖρα”. Rozenbaum indicated the common reference to the “hand that chastises” in Nilus and Apponius. In the latter’s commentary on the *Song*, the “hand” was related to the soul’s chastisement through “losing her goods, through the famine, through the abandonment to the enemies (*uastitatem hostilem*), through the privation of his proximity, through the imprisonment due to slander, through the torments of various maladies (*uariorum infirmitatum tormenta*)”. Apponius’ commentary had come close to Eastern ascetical thought on divine abandonment. Cf. Apponius, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, vol. 2 (books IV-VIII), B. de Vregille and L. Neyrand (eds.), SC 421 (1997), 8.15.

PART 2

1. The Groom abandoned on the cross.

In his *Christology in the Song of Songs*, Elliott put under scrutiny the role that commentaries on the *Song of Songs* played for the formation of the Christological doctrine of the early Church.¹ That is to say that Elliott maintained that—at least from A.D. 381 (1st Constantinople) to A.D. 451 (Chalcedon)—the commentators dealt with the *Song of Songs* as a vehicle to exemplify their Christological positions by exploiting the Song imagery. According to Elliott, Chalcedon signified the shifting of interest from imagery to more precise Christological formulas that the *Song of Songs* was felt to lack. Eventually, according to Elliott, the *Song* fell out of exegetical sight and its theological value faded away.

This part will look at Christ's abandonment on the cross. We will begin by discussing the role that the experience of abandonment of the biblical bride might have played in the formation of a theological position with respect to Christ's abandonment on the cross in late antiquity. Then we will move to illustrate more thoroughly the ways that Byzantine theology developed to provide an interpretation of what actually happened on the cross. In doing so, the purpose of this second part is to show whether there are implicit or explicit connections between the experience of abandonment by the Christian devotee and Christ.

i. The Byzantine sources.

Before we move on to our main discussion we need to make some observations with regard to: i) the nature of the Byzantine sources; ii) their historical context; and iii) the context within which they have discussed Christ's abandonment on the cross.

First of all, we have to ask whether the Byzantine commentaries on the *Song* provided any material that could shed light on Christ's abandonment on the cross. The answer is negative. The commentaries of late antiquity on the *Song of Songs* did not put side by side the experience of the biblical bride and that of Christ on the cross. In fact, Byzantine commentators did not see the bride's abandonment as

¹ Elliott, *The Song of Songs and Christology in the Early Church (381-451)*.

resembling Christ's "loud cry" (φωνή μεγάλη) on the cross.² Theodoret, who provided the most scriptural cross-references in the biblical episode, did not draw any links between Mt 27:46 and Sol 3:1. In advance, we need to note that, whenever Patristic literature provided a discussion about Christ's abandonment, this was never in terms of the experience of the biblical bride.

In the first part, we examined the main exegetical lines that the four main exegetes followed in interpreting divine abandonment in the light of the biblical episodes in the *Song*. Our discussion covered Elliott's suggested span because Gregory of Nyssa was present at the council in Constantinople (A.D. 381) and Theodoret of Cyrrhus was active at the period during the council in Ephesus (A.D. 431) and —more interestingly— he was part of the congregation at Chalcedon (A.D. 451).

According to Elliott's hypothesis, it was only after Chalcedon that Byzantine theology dismissed the imagery of the *Song of Songs* as insufficient to address late antique scepticism about Christ's identity. Prior to Chalcedon, Byzantine theology had depicted the union between humanity and divinity in Christ in terms of an arsenal of imagery that depended on the *Song of Songs*. However, this position seems to be susceptible to criticism. For, when focusing on details -such as the motif of union and separation in the *Song* - it becomes evident that Byzantine Christology never depended on the *Song of Songs* to exemplify the mystery of Christ. At least in the light of the episode in Sol 3:1, what the *Song* was felt to provide was imagery depicting the motif of "union" and "separation" between God and his devotee. In the case of Gregory and Theodoret, this depiction was addressed in concrete terms: i.e. the presence of biblical figures such as Moses (Gregory), David, Paul and Elijah (Theodoret). Humanity was addressed in concrete terms of individuals, as opposed to a more abstract reference to "humanity" that might have implied Christ's humanity. Thus, in the core of their argument was the Christian devotee, such as Moses and Paul.

The Patristic biblical commentators did not involve a discussion about the experience of Christ on the cross in their exegesis on the *Song*. If it is the case that their main concern was the exemplification of the mystery of the incarnation, then it

² Cf. Mt 27:46 and 27:50. Mk 15:34 and 15:37. Lk 23:46. In the Gospels, the Evangelists used the same expression to indicate Christ's cry in dereliction and also, his last breath, i.e. φωνή μεγάλη (loud cry). Thus, they implied the close connection between the loud cry in dereliction and the dying Christ.

is paradoxical that they did not involve a discussion on the abandonment on the cross. This is especially true for exegetes such as Gregory and Theodoret. In the years before composing his *In Canticum*, Gregory had addressed the Apollinarian scepticism about Christ's humanity. In his *Antirrheticus*, the episode on the cross had drawn Gregory's attention in order to show Apollinarian Christological –and Trinitarian– inconsistencies. Scholars have shown that, in his *In Canticum*, Gregory refuted Eunomian Trinitarian theology and also Apollinarian anthropological minimalism. However, in *Homily 6* and *12* of the *In Canticum*, Gregory developed his thought on divine infinity only as part of his refutation of Eunomian existentialism. There is no evidence that Gregory ever linked together the biblical bride to the suffering Christ and the Apollinarian refutation.³ It seems that Gregory never treated Christ as Bridegroom and bride. Christ was the Bridegroom that abandoned the Christian soul; he was never the bride that was abandoned by God.

Elliott and Guinot suggested that, in his commentary, Theodoret deliberated on the Christological turmoil of his era (the Nestorian controversy).⁴ In this case, it is pointless to say that Theodoret missed the chance to discuss the motif of abandonment in a Christological context --he had done so in his other exegetical works. Cyril had already provided the important information that Christ's abandonment on the cross was part of Nestorius' argument in the latter's distinction between the Logos and the Son of Mary.⁵ Indeed, in his *Nestoriana*, Loofs included

³ For Rossé and Balthasar, this position never really changed before the presence of the Rhineland mystics in the West. The latter were the first to employ the image of the abandoned bride as linked to the ascetical experience of abandonment and the suffering Christ on the cross. See G. Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross: A Biblical and Theological Study*, trans. S. W. Arndt (New York NY: Paulist, 1987), 73 and especially 97 [footnote 12]. See also, Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture 13th-18th Centuries*, trans. E. Nicholson (New York NY: St. Martin's, 1990), 73. Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. A. Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 75ff.

⁴ See Elliott, *Christology*. Also Guinot, 'La Christologie'.

⁵ In ACO 1.1.2/49: "Περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ λέγων· Ὁδοτος ὁ λέγων· θεέ μου, θεέ μου, ἵνα τί με ἐγκατέλιπες; οδοτος ὁ τριήμερον τελευτήν ὑπομείνας" ([Nestorius] says about the son : he is the one that says " my God my God why have you abandoned me"? He is the one that underwent the three-day burial). In what followed, Nestorius addressed humanity as a concrete active-subject alongside the divine Logos. Cyril had accused the Nestorian party of dividing Christ into two active-subjects in the same way that Paul of Samosata had divided them in the past. See ACO, 1.1.1/101 and 110, and also 1.1.4/36. Nestorius rejected such an accusation. See Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heraclides*, trans. G.R. Driver and L. Hodgson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 1.1 [book and part]. Loofs and Bethune-Baker tried to establish a reconsideration of Nestorius' Christological thought. However, as Bathrellos indicated –borrowing from McGuckin- the evidence did not suffice to restore Nestorius as a merely-misunderstood theologian. See F. Loofs, *Nestorius and his Place in the History of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: CUP, 1914). J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and his Teaching: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence* (Cambridge: CUP, 1908). J. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria, the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). D. Bathrellos, *The Byzantine*

three passages where Nestorius had addressed Christ's abandonment on the cross.⁶ Abramowski and Goodman provided two further citations.⁷ The fact that Guinot and Pásztori-Cupán maintained Theodoret's orthodoxy with regard to his Christology is not sufficient to remove the paradox that, in a work reflecting the Christological controversies of 5th-century Byzantium, Theodoret did not address the motif of abandonment with regard to Christ's experience on the cross.⁸ If we accept the position of Richard and Bardy about the "tamed" exegete that felt the urgency to provide proof of his Chalcedonian orthodoxy, then Theodoret missed an important chance to show that he did not believe that the suffering subject on the cross was distinct from the Logos—as he was accused by the Cyrillian party.⁹ Cyril had already provided an exegetical exemplar of interpreting Sol 3:1 from a Christological position.¹⁰ For, Cyril had treated Sol 3:1 within a christological/historical framework indicating that the bride's "bed" was Christ's tomb and the bride's "night" was the time when the Myrrh-bearing women approached to venerate the dead Christ, unaware of the resurrection.¹¹ Theodoret must have been aware of this exegetical position which he deliberately avoided turning to Origenist ethical discourse and Gregorian spirituality.¹² If we accept the hypothesis of an early composition for the

Christ: Person, Nature and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 16-24.

⁶ F. Loofs, *Nestoriana: Die Fragments des Nestorius* (Halle A. S: Niemeyer, 1905), 219; 260 and 360. For the overall Antiochean Christology see Grillmeier, *Christ*.

⁷ In fact, Mt 27:46 appears three times in this collection. However, one is a translation of Loof's German text. L. Abramowski and A. E. Goodman (ed.), *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, vol. 2, Cambridge Oriental Publications 19 (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), 43; 68 and 118 [the latter was also included in Loofs, *Nestoriana*, 219].

⁸ Pásztori-Kupán, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*. Also Guinot, 'La Christologie'.

⁹ Elliott, *Christology*, 34. According to Guinot, the commentary on the biblical *Song* was composed before the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy (A.D. 428-431). For, Pásztori-Kupán, it was composed during the "cold war years" between Ephesus (A.D. 431) and Chalcedon (A.D. 451). On the opposite side, Richard and Bardy discerned in the *Commentary* the theological adventures of a radical Antiochene—during the 420s—who was tamed at the years close to Chalcedon. What triggered such diversity of positions was the lack of reference to the humanity of Christ in concrete terms, and also the illustration of the divine Logos as the only active-subject in the commentary. Guinot and Pásztori-Kupán maintained an orthodox Theodoret that remained such throughout his theological career but was quite misunderstood. For Ricard and Grillmeier, Theodoret shifted from an Antiochean Christological language to Cyrillian thought. For Theodoret's reception at Chalcedon see ACO 2.1/69ff.

¹⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragments in Cantica Cantorum*, PG, 69, 1285C.

¹¹ The Cyrillian fragments on the *Song* show that Cyril had diverged from the Origenist and Gregorian tradition by discussing the *Song* from a more historical point of view—always in the light of the incarnation.

¹² In fact, a close associate of Epiphanius of Salamis, Philo of Carpasus, was the first to interpret the *Song of Songs* from a christological/historical point of view. See: Philo of Carpasus, *Enarratio in Canticum Cantorum*, PG 40, 28-153. His purpose was to show the new reality of the Christian history, thus diminishing the value of the Synagogue.

commentary, then it is plausible that Theodoret's work was prior to the Christological debates of 5th-century Byzantium. Pásztori-Kupán's suggestion of a composition earlier than Chalcedon but later than Ephesus (A.D. 431) increases the paradoxical position that Theodoret did not relate Sol 3:1 and Mt 27:46 to each other. As it was mentioned, if the date of composition was later than A.D. 451 (Chalcedon), then Theodoret lost the chance to defend his orthodoxy.

However, this paradox could be solved if we asserted that the *Song of Songs* was treated on its own terms, as opposed to becoming a vehicle of Christological deliberation. The commentators addressed the Christological scepticism of their era, but not exclusively. They did not employ the biblical Song to resolve such scepticism. It seems that, after Origen, the exegetical agenda was directed to the spiritual value of the *Song of Songs* at an ethical level. Even Gregory's refutation of Eunomius was incorporated into his scheme of exhorting to ethical perfection. Despite the Christological debates that the commentators found themselves involved in, the *Song* was expressing an exhortation to ethical advancement for the Christian devotee. It was an arsenal from which the exegetes drew images to this end, as opposed to highlighting such images as addressing the problem of Christ's identity.

Yet another factor needs to be taken into consideration: even when Byzantine theology entered into a discussion of Christ's abandonment on the cross, such a discussion was never conducted in the light of the experience of the biblical bride. This is true for a span that covers Elliott's historical horizon, i.e. from Origen's time (c. A.D. 254) until the Œcumenical Council at Chalcedon and, in fact, even beyond that (e.g. Maximus-John Damascene).¹³ This is another indication of the limited interest that the *Song* aroused as a source for Christological deliberation in late antiquity.

In his excellent introduction to the motif of Christ's loud cry on the cross, Rossé noted that, "the cry of Jesus on the cross did not enjoy any particular attention during the patristic era nor in the successive periods of Carolingian and Scholastic

¹³ John Damascene belonged to the Byzantine era during the outbreak of iconoclasm (A.D. 731) and the Arabic incursion (7th-8th centuries). This era witnessed the progressive diminution of any exegetical interest and the uprising of the need for polemical works alongside handbooks that would define the faith in territories (such as the Persian Empire) since Christianity could no longer count on Imperial protection in her fight to establish herself amongst other religions. See, Louth, *John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2002). Idem, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church A.D. 681-1071*, The Church in History, vol. 3 (Cresswood NY: SVS, 2007)

theology".¹⁴ Rossé did not discuss any particular reasons for this. To the absence of any real interest in Christ's abandonment on the cross, for instance, we could juxtapose the Patristic theological interest in the Gethsemane prayer.¹⁵ Any real theological concern about Christ's abandonment appeared only in terms of polemics during the time of the great Trinitarian and Christological controversies –and even in this case, it was only part of the broader argument. For instance, Léthel, in his influential work on Maximus, examined the importance of the Gethsemane prayer for the development of monothelite/dyothelite lines of reasoning during the 7th century.¹⁶ In the dyoenergist florilegia presented at Laterano (A.D. 649), Christ's abandonment on the cross played only a subordinate role.¹⁷ And even before that, at the time of the Arian controversies, biblical verses such as Pr 8:22 were of central importance, as opposed to Mt 27:46.¹⁸ Little did the Patristic authors write about Mt 27:46 in their polemics. Benoit observed: "from the beginning, Christian exegetes have given a great deal of attention to these words and several suggestions have been put forward to explain this desertion by God".¹⁹ Benoit exaggerated the real attention that the verse attracted in late antiquity. One further element that argues against Benoit's exaggeration is the fact that: i) there was not even a single homiletical work that discussed Christ's abandonment on the cross exclusively; and ii) commentaries on the *Passion Narratives* included a disproportionate interpretation of the loud cry in comparison to their discussion of other elements in the narrative. For instance, a prolific commentator of the stature of John Chrysostom, who interpreted the *Passion Narrative* in *Matthew*, spent only a couple of lines to the loud cry.²⁰ The same is true

¹⁴ Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 73.

¹⁵ For the homiletical works and available commentaries on the prayer see Geerard, *CPG* 5/130.

¹⁶ F. M. Léthel, *Théologie de l'agonie du Christ : La liberté humaine du Fils de Dieu et son importance sotériologique mises en lumière par Saint Maxime le Confesseur*, *Théologie Historique* 52 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979). Idem, *Maxime le Confesseur: L'Agonie du Christ*, *Les Pères dans la foi* 64 (Paris: Migne, 1996). Idem, 'La Prière de Jésus à Gethsémani dans la controverse monothélite', in Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn (eds.), *Maximus Confessor: Actes du symposium sur Maximus le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2-5 Septembre 1980*, *Paradosis* 27 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982). Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 140-147.

¹⁷ See the "Tenth Act" in *ACO*² 2.1/288-368 (dyothelite florilegium) and 370-390 (monothelite florilegium).

¹⁸ Bathrellos examined the importance that the Gethsemane prayer had attracted prior to the monothelite controversies, during the Arian debates. Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*, 141: "it seems that the Gethsemane prayer first came to the fore of doctrinal disputes in the fourth century".

¹⁹ P. Benoît, *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, trans. B. Weatherhead (New York NY: Herder & Herder, 1969), 194.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, *In Matthæum*, PG 57, 776. Chrysostom devoted more than 50 lines to the solar eclipse in Mt. 27:45, and only 12 lines to Mt 27:46. In two contemporary commentaries on *Matthew* and *Mark*, being actually compilations of Byzantine works, Simonetti (*Matthew*) provided four entries

about Cyril of Alexandria.²¹

Overall, the Patristic theological production where the motif of Christ's abandonment appeared could be divided into three groups: i) scriptural commentaries; ii) homilies; and iii) polemical writings.

The first group refers to Byzantine scriptural *Commentaries*.²² Such commentaries discussed and analysed the scriptural text verse by verse. In this case, the commentaries treated Christ's abandonment only as part of the biblical narrative, i.e. –to put it more precisely– the *Passion Narratives*. Comments on Christ's abandonment on the cross were included in exegetical works on *Matthew* and *Psalms* (e.g. Ps 21:1). Rarely, comments appeared in commentaries on other canonical books such as the book of *Isaiah* and Paul's epistles (e.g. *Hebrews*).

The second group contains *Homilies* that were not part of major exegetical works on the scriptures (i.e. *Commentaries*). This group includes occasional homilies whose content was connected to major feasts of the Church (e.g. Holy Saturday), the New Testament readings during the Holy Service, or other occasions. The *Homilies* of this period treated the abandonment of Christ on the cross only briefly without exclusively focusing on it.

The majority of works that preserve the most material about the Patristic theological deliberation on Christ's cry on the cross belong to the third group of theological literature of late antiquity: i.e. polemical works. Such works refuted contemporary Trinitarian and Christological positions.

ii. The historical context.

Early Christian literature (Apostolic Fathers) never directed its attention to Christ's "loud cry" (φωνὴ μεγάλη) on the cross. Historically, the first time that the episode attracted some –insignificant—attention was in Irenæus and appeared in a polemical context. The bishop of Lyon (c. A.D. 130-c. 200) provided the first historical witness that Gnostic circles tried to interpret Christ's loud cry on the cross.

(Hilary of Poitiers, Origen, Jerome, and Chrysostom) for the divine abandonment of Christ while he cited nineteen patristic witnesses for the prayer in the Mount of Olives. Oden and Hall (*Mark*) provided three entries (Augustine was quoted twice and Ambrose once) for Mt 27:46, and nineteen for the prayer in agony. This is an indication of the lack of interpretations by Byzantine commentators. M. Simonetti (ed.), *Matthew 14-28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Illinois IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 253-259 and 292-295. T. C. Oden and C. A. Hall (eds.), *Mark*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Illinois IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 208-214 and 232-234.

²¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarii in Matthæum* (in catenis), PG 72, 312.

²² Cf. Neil, 'Christian Transformation', 326-329.

Despite the fact that Iræneus provided only the Gnostic witness without refuting it, it is evident that, historically, the first attempt to reflect on Christ's experience on the cross was related to conflicting traditions about the identity of Christ: according to some groups of Gnostics, as a lower aeon in the gnostic hierarchy of beings, Christ was truly abandoned by the *Pleroma* or *Wisdom*.²³

The next person to refer to the event was Origen, in the 3rd-century. In his *Contra Celsus*, Origen addressed his interlocutor's despising mockery of the Christian claim of Christ's divinity. According to Origen, Celsus wanted to impose the position that the loud cry on the cross was a mere human cry without any implications about Christ's divine status.²⁴

After the time of Origen, it was only during the fourth century that the loud cry came to the fore again. Its presence occurred in a polemical context. Arianism introduced a sophisticated scepticism about the place of the Logos in the hierarchy of beings. Part of the Arian argument also included Christ's cry in dereliction which the Arians interpreted in terms of his separation from the Father.²⁵ According to the adherents of Arianism, he that was abandoned on the cross could not have existed co-eternally with the Father.²⁶ The experience of abandonment introduced the separation

²³ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.1.7.11 and 1.1.16.22. Cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.25.6 [GCS 1/423].

²⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.32.

²⁵ Mt 27:46 was not Arius' proof text in questioning the Logos' natural divinity. There is no evidence that Arius addressed it at all. It seems that it was Arius' supporters that made it part of their argument. In any case, it was Pr 8:22 that was the most important point of exegetical tension between the Arian and the Nicene party. According to McGuckin, Pr 8:22 "was elevated as his supreme proof text" by Arius. J. A. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Thought* (Westminster: John Knox, 2004), 29. Bromiley indicated that in the Arian thought, "in the New Testament the most important passages are Mk 10:18 and 13:32, Jn 17:3; 5:19 and 14:28. These call God alone Good, speak of the knowledge of the only true God, say that the Son can do nothing of himself, describe the Father as greater than the Son, and refer to the Son's ignorance regarding the last day. In the Old Testament, Pr 8:22 provided the Arians with their strongest support". G. W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 85. For Gregg and Groh, it was Phil 5-11 that was constantly and consistently refuted in Athanasius' *Contra Arianos*. According to them, Arius depended on the scriptural depiction of Christ's "derived" or "received" power and his ignorance. For a thorough discussion of Arianism with respect to its biblical dependence see R. C. Gregg and D. E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (London: SCM, 1981). R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988). R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: SCM, 2001).

²⁶ Athanasius, *Arian*. PG 26, 380: "Ἔστι δὲ καὶ τοῦτο παρ' αὐτῶν λεγόμενον· πῶς δύναται ὁ Λόγος ἴδιος εἶναι τοῦ Πατρὸς, οὐδ' ἀνευ οὐκ ἦν ὁ Πατήρ ποτε, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ποιεῖ, ὡς ὑμεῖς φρονεῖτε, ὁ ἐπὶ μὲν τοῦ σταυροῦ λέγων· Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου, ἵνα τί με εγκατέλιπες;... Εἰ ἦν κατὰ τὴν ὑμετέραν διάνοιαν αἰδίως ὑπάρχων ὁ Υἱὸς πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, οὐτ' ἂν εγκατελείπετο ὁ συνυπάρχων" (it is this that they also say: how is it possible that the Logos belongs to the Father, without whom the Father never existed, through whom he creates everything, like you think, the one who said on the cross: my God, my God, why have you abandoned me... if the Son was not, according to your thought, existing with the Father in all eternity, then he would never have been abandoned he that co-exists). Hanson questioned the degree to which his opponents copied Arius' own words. It seems that Athanasius cited the Arian position but not Arius himself. See Hanson,

between God and the suffering subject (i.e. the Logos).²⁷

In their turn, the exponents of Apollinarianism defended the Logos' natural divinity against the Arian existential diminution. In stressing the divinity of Christ, Apollinarius questioned the integrity of his humanity, indicating that the Logos took the place of *nous* in the incarnation. There is no evidence in Lietzmann's edition that Apollinarius exploited Mt 27:43 in the light of his peculiar minimalistic anthropology.²⁸ In the surviving fragments from Apollinarius' works, Apollinarius exploited the verse in an Athanasian fashion –defending against the Arians– arguing that the loud cry expressed separation and belonged to the humanity of the Logos.²⁹ Gregory of Nyssa included Mt 27:46 in his defence against Apollinarius.³⁰ Yet, Gregory did not address Apollinarian theology on Mt 27:46 as such. Gregory used the verse within a broader discussion of refuting the extreme Apollinarian position that Christ was a “heavenly man”, indicating the problematic elements in Apollinarius' suggested discontinuity between Christ's humanity and the rest of mankind.³¹

'Arius' Own Words', in *Christian Doctrine*, 6-18. Kopecek, Stead and Williams criticised this position indicating the authenticity of such passages in Athanasius' work. For the literature on this matter see Hanson, *Christian Doctrine*, 11 (footnotes no. 33 and 34). For Arius' theology see also, J. Behr, 'Arius', in *The Nicene Faith, Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 2/2 (Crestwood NY: SVS, 2004), 130-149.

²⁷ Epiph. *Pan.* 69.19.5 [GCS 3/168]: “[quoting from Arius] καὶ πάλιν ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ, φησὶν, ἔλεγεν: Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου ἵνα τί με εγκατέλιπες; καὶ ὄρῳ, φησὶν, ὡς ἐπιδέεται βοηθείας;” (and again on the cross, he says, he [Christ] said: my God, my God why have you abandoned me? and do you see, he says, how he is in need of assistance).

²⁸ H. Lietzmann (ed.), *Apollinarius von Laodicea und Seine Schule* (Verlag: Georg Olms, 1970). See Bathrellos, 'Apollinarianism', in *Byzantine Christ*, 10-16. Cf. Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5.9.12 [in GCS 19/292]: “οὔτε ἄψυχον, οὔτε ἄνουον ἢ ἀτελή τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς οἰκονομίαν παραδεχόμενοι, ὅλον δὲ εἰδότες τέλειον μὲν πρὸ αἰώνων ὄντα Θεόν Λόγον, τέλειον δὲ ἄνθρωπον ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν γενόμενον” (not soulless nor without nous nor imperfect, do we accept the economy of the flesh, but we know that the whole is, on the one hand, perfect Word of God before all ages; on the other hand, he became perfect man in the latter days for our salvation).

²⁹ E. Mühlenberg (ed.), *Psalmenkommentare aus der Katenenüberlieferung*, vol. 1, PTS 15 (1975), 28 [Ps. 37:22] and 53 [Ps. 42:2] [hereafter *Fragmenta in Psalmos* followed by number of fragment].

³⁰ Gregory, *Apol.* 3.1/168.

³¹ Grillmeier, 'The Heavenly Man', in *Christ*, 330-333. Behr, 'Antirrheticus against Apollinarius', in *Nicene Faith*, 2/2, 451-458. For Grillmeier the idea of a 'heavenly humanity' was a misunderstanding of Apollinarian Christology by his contemporaries. Before Grillmeier, Harnack had argued that Apollinarius' Christology was not different from his opponents. The 'heavenly man' did not signify a flesh that had come from heaven. The incarnation introduced a historical analogy between Christ and the condition of the Logos in his divine status. A. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 4, trans. E. B. Speirs and J. Millar, Theological Translation Library (London: Williams & Norgate, 1898), 149-163. For Behr, Gregory objected to the discontinuity between Christ's humanity and our humanity. Apollinarius was approaching human mutability from a Platonic (negative) point of view. For Gregory, “change”, as expressed in Christ's humanity, was the basis of Christian asceticism and spirituality. Olson missed this latter point in his attempt to argue the continuity between Athanasius and Apollinarius. According to him, Apollinarius was only working on an Athanasian line of

Nestorius, in the fifth century, refuted such an Apollinarian discontinuity at the expense of sharply distinguishing between two active subjects: the Son of Mary who suffered on the cross and the divine Logos who worked miracles on earth.³² As it was noted, part of the Nestorian argument was the loud cry on the cross. However, this episode played only a secondary role in the formulation of his “dividing” Christology. The main opponent of Nestorius, Cyril of Alexandria, included a more thorough discussion on the loud cry as part of his polemics against the Nestorian party. In his exegetical works prior to the Nestorian outbreak, Cyril had only treated Mt 27:46 as part of the *Passion Narrative*.³³

In the years following after Ephesus (A.D. 431) and the era around the controversial council in Chalcedon (A.D. 451), monophysitism tried to establish itself as Cyril’s successor in Christology: it attacked Nestorianism and also threatened the ecclesiastical and imperial unity.³⁴ The years after Chalcedon (5th-7th centuries) progressively encouraged the appearance of monothelitism: a ramification of imperial attempts to safeguard the political unity of Byzantium through encouraging an ecclesiastical unity.³⁵ It was mentioned that the prayer in Gethsemane played an important role in the development of post-Chalcedonian monothelite theology. Any discussion of the loud cry on the cross was only a part of

reasoning that the Cappadocians never really realised (Harnack’s position). For Olson, the Cappadocian refutation of Apollinarianism resulted in a consequent refutation of “Athanasianism”. R. E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 188-190. According to Behr, Apollinarius was more careless in his Christology than Olson had observed. See also, P. Gavrilyuk, ‘Arianism Opposed: The Word’s Divinity is not Diminished by Involvement in Suffering’, in *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 101-134.

³² In ACO 1.1.2/49. Gavrilyuk showed how close Nestorius brought himself to the Arian notion of divine transcendence in his attempt to safeguard the notion of divine impassibility. See Gavrilyuk, ‘The Similarity between the Function of Divine Impassibility in Arianism and Nestorianism’, in *Suffering*, 141-144.

³³ McGuckin has presented the fullest account of the Nestorian controversy so far, putting under scrutiny the modern “romantic” restoration of Nestorius. McGuckin questioned the depiction of Cyril as a stubborn, intransigent and inferiorly-educated theologian. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril*. For Wessel, Cyril was far different from the modern depiction of a bishop that was not learned in the classic letters. S. Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2004). Bathrellos, ‘Nestorianism’, in *Byzantine Christ*, 16-24. Grillmeier traced this modern approach to reassess Nestorius’ theological position in the work of J. Garnier. See Grillmeier’s, ‘The Nestorius’ Question in Modern Study’, in *Christ*, 559-568.

³⁴ For the years from Ephesus (A.D. 431) to Chalcedon (A.D. 451) see Grillmeier, ‘From Ephesus to Chalcedon’, in *Christ*, 488-539, and ‘The Council of Chalcedon’, in *ibid*, 543-554. For the reception of and reaction to Chalcedon see Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604)*, vol. 2.1-2, trans. J. Cawte and P. Allen (London: Mowbray, 1987-1995). Also, J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church A.D. 450-680*, Church History 2 (Crestwood NY: SVS, 1989).

³⁵ Cf. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity*.

the broader argument concerning the number and operation of Christ's energies. Characteristically, the main exponent of Chalcedonian theology, Maximus the Confessor, addressed the number of *wills* and *energies* in Christ without ever introducing the loud cry on the cross. The only witness about any discussion on Mt 27:46 during this era was limited to the *florilegia* promoting the dyothelite theology. The mono-energist *florilegium* presented in 2nd Constantinople (A.D. 680) did not include any patristic *uses* (χρήσεις) on the loud cry on the cross. It is only the dyo-energist *florilegia* that included such patristic *uses* --primarily drawn from the time of the Arian controversies-- on the scriptural episode.³⁶ However, even in this case, the patristic preference for exegesis on the Gethsemane prayer was significantly larger than patristic interpretation on the loud cry.

2. The nature of divine abandonment.

i. Byzantine exegesis: separation or prayer?

The main feature of modern scholarship on the loud cry on the cross is exegetical diversity. Based on the textual analysis of the episode in the Synoptics, three possible assertions are brought to the fore:³⁷ i) the loud cry was an intentional interpolation added at a later stage either by the evangelist or copyists.³⁸ According to Rossé, even those defending the authenticity of the cry are divided with regard to the content of the loud cry on the cross. Whereas some support Christ's true separation from the Father,³⁹ others discern the obedient prayer of the Son to the Father.⁴⁰ In most cases, it is the identification of the loud cry with Ps 21:1 that has become the stumbling point: did Christ appropriate the psalm in its literal meaning or

³⁶ In ACO², 1/84-90 and 258-336. *Ibid*, 2.1/288-368 (dyothelite-dyoenergist *florilegia*) and 370-390 (monothelite *florilegium*).

³⁷ Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 39cf. For the textual analysis of the Passion Narrative with regard to Christ's loud cry see D. P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 39 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975). R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave; A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, vols. 1-2, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York NY: Doubleday, 1994). L. Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992).

³⁸ Branscomb distinguished Mark's pen: the loud cry was an articulate addition by Mark in introducing a flavour of the Old Testament to the scene. B. H. Branscomb, *The Gospel of Mark*, Moffat New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937), 297. C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 682-3.

³⁹ Brown, 'Jesus' Death Cry', in *Messiah*, vol. 2, 1043-1069. Also, M. B. Carra de Vaux Saint Cyr, 'L'Abandon du Christ en croix', in H. Bouëssé et al. (eds.), *Problèmes actuels de Christologie*, Textes et études théologiques (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 295-316.

⁴⁰ J. P. Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1991), 83. Keener, *Matthew*, 682-3.

is it the case that he used the psalm as an allusion to the faithful suffering servant of the Old Testament?

Byzantine analysis of the loud cry was formed in a long process that never raised questions about the authenticity of the words: Christ did cry out what appears to be the opening verse of Ps 21:1. With the exception of Theodore of Mopsuestia,⁴¹ there was no doubt about the identification of Mt 27:46 with Ps 21:1. Exegetes such as John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrrhus explicitly highlighted this connection. Alexandrian exegetes (e.g. Cyril) overlooked the connection by focusing on the actual event of abandonment, stressing that the cry belonged to Christ. It is a paradox that, in their exegetical works on the *Psalms*, Athanasius, Didymos, Theophilus and Cyril of Alexandria highlighted the link between Mt 27:46 and Ps 21:1; however, in their polemical works, they totally overlooked this point.

The main issue in Patristic thought was the content of the cry; that is to say, the degree to which the loud cry on the cross expressed dereliction or not. Due to the proclaimed divine character of Christ, from the time of Origen onwards, it was felt that the cry belonged to Christ but only in a refined way (*οικειώσις*). Through a long process of theological development, Byzantine theology tried to appropriate the presence of natural expressions in Christ without introducing the notion of natural corruption. Abandonment was not the only motif that theology of late antiquity felt the urgency to refine in Christ's case. This experience was grouped together with other natural expressions –such as thirst, hunger, labour, rest, ignorance and fear. Didymos the Blind was the first exponent in a process that created a technical anthropological understanding of such passions as natural expressions of his humanity. In this way, Patristic thought sought to maintain Christ's ethical purity and safeguard the reality of his incarnation. However, it was only after the 7th-century that Byzantine theology addressed such natural expressions in technical terms (*blameless passions*).⁴²

⁴¹ In his exegetical work, Theodore of Mopsuestia dismissed the Christological value of Ps. 21:2 which he found inappropriate to be rendered to Christ due to the centrality of sin in the psalm. See Theodoret, *Psalm*. PG 80, 1009.

⁴² Irenaeus was the first to introduce the presence of such natural passions in his defence of the reality of the incarnation against the Gnostics. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.33.8ff. Didymos employed the medical terminology of his time to distinguish between degrees that a passion is expressed (*πάθος-προπάθεια*, *passio-propassio*). Didymos introduced a more technical means of defending the reality of natural passions. Didymos, *In Psalmos 20-21*, 43.20 [Ps. 21.21] [reference to fragments in PTA 7]. Didymos, *FrPs*, 716 [Ps. 68:17] [references to fragments in PTS 15-16]. D. Brakke, *Demons and the*

a. Origen: patristic foundations

In his pioneering doctoral thesis *L'Abandon du Christ par son Père durant sa passion d'après la tradition patristique et les docteurs du XIIIe siècle*, Jouassard examined the motif of Christ's abandonment in the patristic era.⁴³ He noted the diversity of patristic positions and classified Patristic thought in two groups: i) realism; and ii) typology. According to Jouassard, this polarisation of patristic interpretations originated in Origen.⁴⁴ Indeed, Origen was the first Christian author to address the motif of Christ's abandonment on the cross.⁴⁵ According to Jouassard, Origen followed two diverging directions in his interpretation on Mt 27:46:⁴⁶ "realism on the one hand, metaphorical system on the other".⁴⁷ Jouassard's thesis and subsequent articles were influential for patristic studies on this matter. Most of the scholars addressing the loud cry on the cross have maintained this polarization between realism and metaphor.⁴⁸

It seems that Jouassard was following the current continental theology of the first half of the 20th century with regard to Origenist studies. Origenist scholarship reached its peak with Daniélou's highlighting the presence of three exegetical

Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 54. Cf. Grillmeier, *Christ*, 363. Maximus the Confessor appropriated the Aristotelian analysis of Nemesius of Emesa concerning natural passions by introducing the distinction between "actions" that are "up to us" (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) and those actions that "are not up to us" (οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν). Nemesius also appropriated the Stoic classification of fear and shrinking back into various ethical levels. Cf. Aristotle, *Ethics*, 3.1109b-1119b. Nemesius, *Natur.* 19 [pg. 80 in Morati's edition], 21 [pg. 20], 29-34 [pg. 93-104] and 39-40 [pg. 112-117]. Maximus, *QnD.* 66 [PG 90, 837]. Maximus, *Thal.* 42 [PG 90, 405]. Damascene, *ExpF.* 38-42 [pp 94-99], 64 [pp 162-163] and 67 [pp 165-166]. See W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 152-181.

⁴³ G. Jouassard, *L'Abandon du Christ par son Père durant sa passion d'après la tradition patristique et les docteurs du XIIIe siècle* (PhD Thesis: Institut catholique de Lyon, 1923). Unfortunately, his thesis which was submitted at the Catholic Institute in Lyon has never been published. Jouassard produced a couple of articles extracted from his thesis which are the only source available about his work. Notwithstanding the excellent InterLibrary Loan service (ILL) in Durham University, and despite my many efforts, it has been impossible to obtain a copy of this thesis. Even the Bibliothèque Nationale de France was unable to provide any help in this matter. Thus, this section entirely depends—with due caution—on Jouassard's articles: G. Jouassard, 'L'Abandon du Christ en croix dans la tradition grecque des IV^e et V^e siècles', *RSR* 26 (1925), 609-633. Idem, 'L'Abandon du Christ en croix dans la tradition grecque', *RSPTh* 14 (1925), 633ff.

⁴⁴ Jouassard, 'L' Abandon du Christ en croix dans la tradition grecque des IV^e et V^e siècles', 609 [hereafter 'L'Abandon'].

⁴⁵ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.1.7.11; 1.1.16.22.

⁴⁶ Jouassard, 'L' Abandon', 609. Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 73cf.

⁴⁷ Jouassard, 'L' Abandon', 609.

⁴⁸ Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 73: "[Origen] finds himself at the beginning of two currents of interpretation that persist until the Middle Ages". The same idea resounded in Carra de Vaux Saint Cyr, 'L'Abandon', 305-306. Cf. Balthasar, *Mysterium*, 125 (footnote no. 70).

currents in Origenist exegesis: i) literalism; ii) typology; and iii) allegory.⁴⁹ In his thesis, Jouassard drew the distinction between literalism and typology.

Indeed, in his *Selecta in Psalmos*,⁵⁰ Origen treated Ps 21:1 in a “typological” manner: Origen identified Mt 27:46 with Ps 21:1:

[Ps 21:1] this is the voice of Christ our Lord when he was hanging on the cross, and in another way it is a type of our own passion. For, we were abandoned and forsaken before... he appropriated our folly and malediction.⁵¹

Christ’s utterance was the cry of the humankind that Christ “accommodated” for himself. Being a *type* of the suffering humanity (τὸ ἡμέτερον πάθος τυποῖ), he became the mouth of his humanity: it was the human race that was abandoned by God due to the fall. Rossé put under question the degree to which Christ was personally involved in the passion. According to Rossé, “Christ as the representative of humanity expresses a reality that does not regard him directly but concerns his body, of which he is the head”.⁵² Rossé was following Jouassard’s position that, for Origen, Christ suffered as the head of his body without being personally involved in the suffering. Christ gave voice to the pain of the human race through his loud cry by “accommodating” (οἰκειούμενος) a “passion” (πλημμελής) that did not involve him personally. At the end of the day, it is the human race that was abandoned by God, not Christ.

To this position, Jouassard juxtaposed the Alexandrian’s exegetical interpretation in his *Commentarii in Matthæum*. In this latter work, Origen elaborated an “alternative” exegesis: Origen highlighted Christ’s personal involvement in his suffering. The subject of abandonment was Christ.

Certain people, in an outward display of piety for Jesus, because they are unable to explain how Christ could be forsaken by God, believe that this saying from the cross is true only as an expression of his humility. We, however, who know that he who was “in the form of God” descended from the greatness of his stature and emptied himself, “taking the form of a servant” according to the will of the one who sent him, understand that he was *indeed* forsaken by the Father inasmuch as he who was the form of the invisible God and the image of the Father “took the form of a servant”. He was forsaken for people so that he might shoulder so great a work and come “even to death” and “the death of the cross”, a work which seems most

⁴⁹For a review of the literature on this subject see P. Martens, ‘Origen the Allegorist and the Typology/AllegoryDistinction’, URL: www.pitts.emory.edu/hmpec/secdocs/Martens_Origen_SBL_04.pdf (last accessed 05/03/08). For Martens, the definition of typology as non-literal interpretation is misleading. Martens indicated that Daniélou applied to Origen a distinction that had been already circulating in continental exegetical circles. Cf. G. Zimmermann, *Die Hermeneutischen Prinzipien Tertullians* (Würzburg: K. Triltsch, 1937). Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 6.1ff.

⁵⁰ It is still quite debatable if this is an authentic work of Origen.

⁵¹ Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos*, PG 12, 1253A [Ps. 21:1]: “Αὕτη ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Κυρίου Χριστοῦ, τῷ σταυρῷ προσηλωμένου, καὶ ἄλλως δὲ τυποῖ τὸ ἡμέτερον πάθος. Ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἦμεν οἱ ἐγκαταλειμμένοι καὶ παρεωραμένοι πρότερον... ὥσπερ τὴν ἀφροσύνην ἡμῶν καὶ τὸ πλημμελὲς οἰκειούμενος”.

⁵² Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 73.

shameful to most people. It was the height of his abandonment when they crucified him with thieves and when “those who passed by blasphemed and wagged their heads”. The chief priests and scribes said, “He saved others but cannot save himself”. At that time “even the thieves reviled him” on the cross. Clearly then you will be able to understand the saying “Why have you forsaken me”? when you compare the glory Christ had in the presence of the Father with the contempt he sustained on the cross, for his throne was “like the sun in the presence of God and like the moon established forever; and he was his faithful witness in heaven”. Afterwards, he also added with regard to those reasons for which he said “why have you forsaken me”.⁵³

The reality of the experience was unquestionable; Christ was indeed abandoned. Origen opened his exegesis with an attack on a “pious” attitude that overruled Christ’s abandonment in real terms: according to it, the loud cry was an expression of his humility. In vigorous terms, Origen denied such piety maintaining the reality of the experience. For Origen, Christ was the subject of abandonment. Origen defined the meaning of abandonment: Origen pointed out the dramatic character of the incarnation: i.e. the Logos’ *kenosis*. It was the Logos’ *kenosis* that explained Christ’s voice in dereliction. At the core of his argument, Origen placed a term that was meant to play the most important role in Christian theology. From Athanasius to Cyril of Alexandria, and --in modern theology-- from the German *kenotists* of the 19th century (Gottfried Thomasius) to the theology of Sergius Bulgakov and von Balthasar, and from the ascetical ideal of the Rhineland mystics in the West to the modern kenotic spirituality of Sophronius Sakharov in the East, the notion of *kenosis* became the main *terminus technicus* to exemplify the mystery of the incarnation.

According to Origen, having left the majesty of the Fatherly bosom, the Logos became the subject of mockery and contempt. Origen has compared the current status of the suffering Christ to his divine glory. His abandonment is a sort of poverty with regard to his glory: being “in the form of God”, he was scorned and reviled “in the form of a servant”. The term *kenosis* did not occur here as such. However, Origen alluded to Phil 2:6-7.⁵⁴ Origen juxtaposed “the form of God” with that “of a servant” to highlight the notion of the Logos’ poverty. If, in his *In Psalmos*, Origen had emphasised the notion of “separation”, in his *In Matthæum*, the motif of

⁵³ Origen, *Commentarii in Matthæum*, 135 [in Simonetti, *Matthew*, 294].

⁵⁴ It is the *locus classicus* where *kenosis* appeared in the New Testament. St. Evans, ‘The Self-Emptying of God’, in S. Davis et al. (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 246-272. L. Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God* (New York NY: Paulist, 1997). R. B. Strimple, ‘Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions’, *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1978), 247-268. P. D. Feinberg, ‘The Kenosis and Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Analysis of Phil 2:6-11’, *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980), 21-46.

abandonment took the form of “poverty”: it was a condition that the Logos underwent in the process of the incarnation. For Jouassard, exegetical “realism” highlighted the motif of *accommodation* (οικείωσις); whereas, the “metaphorical system” featured Christ’s self-emptying (κένωσις).

But this theological juxtaposition between “realism” and “typology” is problematic: it suggests that the notion of *accommodation* denied Christ’s real involvement in the passion. More or less, Jouassard suggested that the Origenist *accommodation* was a vague exegetical formula that bears no real meaning. It related Christ to the suffering humankind without truly addressing the true sense in which Christ underwent abandonment: if he was not abandoned, how did he complain without pretending? How did he approach the suffering humanity if he did not suffer? Jouassard and Rossé’s position suggested that Christ suffered as a representative of the human race. Such a position has implications for soteriology: Origen’s soteriology was endangered by his typology. Salvation depended on a true personal involvement of Christ in human suffering.

In *Fragments* surviving under Origen’s name, the author indicated that:

And I (i.e. the Logos) am asking for your help; as if he is without assistance by the Father, but he is not really without assistance even if he says; My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?⁵⁵

The presence of the condition “as if” could justify modern scepticism about the degree to which Origen believed that the experience of abandonment was truly authentic. However, Origen rejected an ontological separation between Christ and Father. It was Christ’s soul that became the bearer of human transgressions:

Christ says, my soul is filled with troubles, for he bears our sins in his soul and, he is filled with troubles... For, if he carries our sins and suffers for us, he properly says that he is filled with troubles.⁵⁶

There is no doubt that Origen pushed the identification of Christ with human suffering to its extremes: through his soul, Christ made human suffering his own. Origen denied a separation between Logos and God. The presence of a “human soul” in Christ enabled Origen to maintain the full accommodation of human suffering by

⁵⁵ Origen, *Fragments in Psalmos 1-150*, Ps 87.5 [edition in J. B. Pitra (ed.), *Analecta Sacra Spicilegio Solesmensi Parata*, vols. 2-3 (Venice: St. Lazarus Monastery, 1966)]: “καὶ τῆς σῆς δεομαι βοηθείας. Ὡς ἀβοήθητος μὲν, οὐ μὴν ἀληθῶς ἀβοήθητος, ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς, εἰ καὶ εἶπεν: Ὁ Θεὸς, ὁ Θεὸς μου, ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;”.

⁵⁶ Origen, *ibid*, Ps 87.3: “ἐπλήσθη κακῶν ἡ ψυχὴ μου, ὁ Χριστὸς λέγει, τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρων ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ, καὶ πλήρης ὢν [κακῶν]... Εἰ αὐτὸς τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἐβάστασε, καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ὀδυνᾶται, εἰκότως κακῶν ἐνεπλήσθη, φησὶν”.

Christ, without endangering his ethical purity and also his divine relationship with the Father. For Origen, it was Christ's soul that truly suffered on the cross. The Logos remained united to the Father. And through his human soul, he participated in human sufferings. Thus, Origen did not question the authenticity of Christ's personal involvement in human suffering.

What Jouassard called "realism" was a theological device that asserted the condescension of the Logos to human maledictions through his human soul. The "metaphorical system" maintained Christ's ethical purity and his ontological status as divine. In both cases, it is the soul that was the subject of human suffering.

Unlike what Jouassard suggested, Origen envisaged the notion of *kenosis* as poverty only in terms of the Logos' identification with human suffering at a real level. Otherwise, even the "realism" of the Logos' *kenosis* would have been endangered by Christ's *accommodation* of human passions, understood as an action in pretence. But for Origen, the *accommodation* was not a mechanism that kept the Logos personally uninvolved in human suffering:⁵⁷ "(Christ prays) not in pretence for Satan, not by *accommodating* the will of the world, but in his own person, he economically prays with a cry".⁵⁸ Origen seemed to have juxtaposed *accommodation* to personal involvement. However, even in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen had defined the incarnation as the condescension of the Logos to the natural limitations of the soul. Thus, it is impossible to separate between the economy of the incarnation and the *accommodation* of human conditions. What Origen denied was not *accommodation* as a genuine reality in Christ, but an understanding of his experience in a "metaphorical" sense that would remove the notion of Christ's personal involvement in human suffering. Weinandy illustrated that it was Origen's constant concern to illustrate God's personal involvement in suffering.⁵⁹ Thus, the notion of *accommodation* did not remove the ideal of divine involvement. It refined the over-humanisation of the Logos that might have endangered his divine state.⁶⁰

Origen provided a genuine understanding of the loud cry on the cross. He

⁵⁷ For Weinandy, love is the divine feature that transcends divine impassibility and illustrates an authentic way in which God becomes a co-sufferer with the humankind. See Weinandy, 'Origen and the Suffering of God', *SP* 36 (2001), 456-460. Idem, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

⁵⁸ Origen, *ibid*, Ps 68.14: "[ο]κ ἐν ὑποκρίσει ἐπὶ τὸ δελεᾶσαι τὸν Σατανᾶν, οὐ τὸ τοῦ κόσμου οἰκειούμενος θέλημα, ἀλλ' ἐξ οἰκείου προσώπου Χριστὸς οἰκονομικῶς ἔκουσίως προσεύχεται μετὰ κραυγῆς".

⁵⁹ Weinandy, 'Origen and the Suffering of God'.

⁶⁰ Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 3.32.10.

defined it in terms of separation and poverty. It was separation with respect to Christ's humanity (i.e. soul), and poverty according to Christ's divinity. Origen tried to illustrate the condescension of the Logos to human suffering avoiding applying the motif of abandonment as separation to the relationship between the Logos and his Father. In employing the language of *accommodation*, Origen showed the authenticity of Christ's identification with human suffering. Arguing Christ's experience in terms of *kenosis*, Origen maintained the divine state of Christ without endangering the reality of his experience.

b. Athanasius of Alexandria: against the Arians

After the time of Origen, the partisans of Arianism posed the question that Origen had not answered: what was the theological implication of abandonment with regard to the being of the Logos? Origen had denied a separation between the Father and his Logos. The Arians exploited a literal understanding of the loud cry in their attempt to support their questioning of the divine state of the Logos. The Arians applied the "narrowest" and most literal exegesis for the word abandonment in Mt 27:46. Thus, Jouassard has remarked: "the Arians sought to profit from the scene of the anguish to deny that a being thus overpowered by suffering is really the power of God".⁶¹ It was remarked earlier that Mt 27:46 was only one amongst the various biblical verses that the Arians used in their dispute on the divine state of the Logos. Athanasius provided the necessary information about the way that the Arians included the loud cry as part of their theological argument.

Athanasian refutation of the Arian interpretation of Mt 27:46 was not systematic.⁶² Still, there was an inner logic to his argument that enables us to discern the pattern of his thought. In advance, it needs to be noticed that though Athanasius did not deny that abandonment was experienced by the Logos in his humanity, he never demonstrated the mechanism in which Christ's humanity could ever have been abandoned. That is to say, Athanasius introduced an exegetical obscurity about the precise subject of abandonment and the way in which abandonment took place.

Athanasius' interest in Mt 27:46 occurred only as a response to his Arian interlocutors. Though he never put aside his defence of the divinity of the Logos, his

⁶¹ Jouassard, 'L' Abandon', 610.

⁶² Jouassard, *ibid*, 612. For an introduction to Athanasian thought see T. G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, Great Theologians Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

exegesis corresponded in many ways with the Arian line of reasoning, highlighting the logical absurdities and inconsistencies of their argument. Athanasius was more interested in bringing to light such inconsistencies. He did not intend to provide a psychological discussion of what happened on the cross. That is to say that Athanasius did not engage in a creative discussion concerning the experience of abandonment *qua* experience.

Athanasius addressed questions imposed by his Arian interlocutors who refuted the natural divinity of the Logos:⁶³

How is it possible that the Logos is essential to the Father without whom the Father was never, and through whom he makes all things, as you believe, who said upon the cross, 'my God, my God why have you abandoned me?'... If the Son was, according to your thought, from all eternity to the Father as his Logos, he would not have been ignorant of the day, but he knew; nor would he that co-exists from everlasting be abandoned.⁶⁴

According to Athanasius' witness, the Arians were taking the loud cry on the cross at face value. How was it possible that the Logos was abandoned by his Father? Did the Logos ever exist separated from his Father, even for a moment? According to Mt 27:46, he did. The Arians defined abandonment as separation: the Logos was abandoned —i.e. separated— by the Father. The logic behind the Arian question involved the notion of divine mutability: if the Logos was God and always existed united to the Father, then the separation on the cross introduced a change to his everlasting relationship to the Father.⁶⁵ But according to the Arians, only an exalted creature could have been subject to such a change. The Arian passage cited by Athanasius is indicative of the Arian position: if there was a time that the Logos was separated from the Father, then it was not illogical to argue that the Logos was not divine in his nature.

Gavrilyuk examined the Arian position in terms of the notion of divine immutability and impassibility. In order to compromise between divine impassibility and the soteriological need for a "divine" involvement in human suffering, Arius

⁶³ Most lines in the Athanasian corpus addressing the loud cry on the cross are found in his *Orationes tres Contra Arianos*, and especially in his third oration where Athanasius had extensively refuted Arian interpretation on scriptural passages.

⁶⁴ Athanasius, *Arian*. PG 26, 380: "Πῶς δύναται ὁ Λόγος ἴδιος εἶναι τοῦ Πατρὸς, οὐδ' ἀνευ οὐκ ἦν ὁ Πατήρ ποτε, δι' οὐδ' τὰ πάντα ποιεῖ, ὡς ὑμεῖς φρονεῖτε, ὁ ἐπὶ μὲν τοῦ σταυροῦ λέγων: Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου, ἵνα τί με εγκατέλιπες;... Εἰ ἦν κατὰ τὴν ὑμετέραν διάνοιαν αἰδίως ὑπάρχων ὁ Υἱὸς πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, οὐτ' ἂν ἠγνόησε περὶ τῆς ἡμέρας, ἀλλ' ἐγίνωσκεν ὡς Λόγος, οὐτ' ἂν εγκατελείπετο ὁ συνυπάρχων".

⁶⁵ G. D. Dragas, *Athanasiana: Essays in the Theology of Saint Athanasius* vol. 1 (London: 1980), 51: "Arius' starting point is theo-monistic and results in a tension between the transcendent absolute being of God and the transient and contingent being of the creatures, which are seen as opposites".

maintained a suffering subject that was not “mere man” (soteriology), but was not fully divine (impassibility) either. According to Gavrilyuk, divine impassibility and immutability provided a coherent background for the Arian argument.⁶⁶

To answer these objections, Athanasius employed a threefold device: i) scriptural quotations manifesting the divinity of the Logos; ii) scriptural witnesses that the Father did not abandon his Son; and iii) scriptural witnesses indicating transgressions as part of human nature.

Athanasius juxtaposed the biblical depiction of Christ encouraging and exhorting his disciples to put off cowardice before death with the image of Christ shinking back at Gethsemane.⁶⁷ Also, he brought to the fore Christ’s assertion that the power to lay down his own soul lay was his.⁶⁸ Athanasius intended to show the absurdity of supporting the idea that Christ encouraged his disciples against cowardice while he shrank back before death. Thus, Athanasius juxtaposed the motif of *life* with that of *death*.⁶⁹ For Athanasius, it was illogical that Christ was recipient of both attributes (i.e. cowardice and courage) at the same time.⁷⁰

Athanasius pointed out that the Logos was never actually abandoned by the Father on the cross:

Lo, when he utters ‘why have you abandoned me?’ the Father showed that as always he was in him then. The earth, knowing its talking master, immediately was trembling, and the veil was torn apart, the sun was hiding, and the stones were cracking, and the graves, as I said, opened, and the dead that were in them were raised.⁷¹

The natural and supernatural phenomena related by the evangelists manifested his divine power remaining united with the Father. For Athanasius, Christ maintained his unbreakable relationship with the Father on the cross. Athanasius agreed with his interlocutor that, if he was abandoned by the Father, *qua* Logos, he could not have been God in his nature:⁷² “so, it is not possible that he was abandoned by the Father, the Lord who is in him in all eternity, and before he spoke and after he left this cry

⁶⁶ Gavrilyuk, *Suffering of God*.

⁶⁷ Athanasius, *Arian*. PG 26, 436.

⁶⁸ Athanasius, *ibid*, 437.

⁶⁹ Athanasius, *ibid*, 436.

⁷⁰ Cyril developed this Athanasian line of reasoning by illustrating the absurdity of maintaining that the source of life was afraid of death. Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *ComLk* (in catenis), PG 72, 920A.

⁷¹ Athanasius, *Arian*. PG 26, 441: “ἰδοὺ γὰρ λέγοντος αὐτοῦ, Ἴνα τί με εγκατέλιπες; ἐδείκνυεν ὁ Πατήρ, ὡς αἰεὶ καὶ τότε ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ. Ἡ γὰρ γῆ, γινώσκουσα τὸν λαλοῦντα Δεσπότην, ἐβθῶς ἔτρεψε, καὶ τὸ καταπέτασμα ἐσχίζετο, ὁ ἥλιός τε ἐκρόπτετο, καὶ αἱ πέτραι διεβρῆγγυντο, καὶ τὰ μὲν μνημεῖα, ὡς προεῖπον, ἠνοιγέτο, οἱ δὲ ἐν αὐτοῖς νεκροὶ ἠγείροντο”.

⁷² Jouassard, ‘L’ Abandon’, 611.

(i.e. Mt 27:46).”⁷³ But unlike the Arians, Athanasius maintained the immutability of the Logos. This position could expose Athanasius to the accusation that he taught an action in pretence on the cross. For, if it was not the Logos that was abandoned on the cross, then the loud cry would have no meaning.

There is no indication that Athanasius actually faced such scepticism.⁷⁴ However, from his overall argument, it is apparent that Athanasius knew the weakness of such a position which he tried to argue. He provided a positive and a negative answer with respect to the suffering subject: “it was the Logos crying out what belongs to the soul”;⁷⁵ “it was not the Logos *qua* the Logos”.⁷⁶ The subject of abandonment was the humanity of the Logos. In this case, the soul (ψυχή) represented the whole of the human race.⁷⁷ The Athanasian position depended on the Origenist refinement of Christ’s suffering in the “form of the servant”. The patriarch of Alexandria, however, did not define abandonment as the Logo’s “poverty”. For the latter, abandonment was a matter of “separation” that actually highlighted the distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia*.⁷⁸

⁷³ Athanasius, *Arian*. PG 26, 440: “Ὅθεν οὐδὲ ἐγκαταλείπεσθαι δύναται παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς ὁ Κύριος ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ ὦν αἰεὶ, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ εἰπεῖν, καὶ ὅτε ταύτην ἠφίει τὴν φωνήν”.

⁷⁴ The question in the *De Sancta Trinitate* was articulated in order to introduce his position. Athanasius, *Trin*. PG 28,1261D: “Τίς ἦν ὁ λέγων: θεέ μου θεέ μου, ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες;” (who was the one that says: my God, my God why have you abandoned me?). In the West, Ambrose established a more anthropological notion of abandonment explicitly connecting Christ’s experience to contemporary humanity. For Ambrose, Christ shared with the rest of the human race the same ‘feeling’ of being abandoned during perilous times. His position antedated the eastern ascetical motif of abandonment in terms of feeling left alone in trials. Thus, Ambrose brought Christ closer to human experience without involving the notion of sin. For Origen and Athanasius, abandonment was linked to the state of fallen humanity. See Ambrose, *De Fide* 2, 7.7-37 [PL 16, 594]]. Isaac of Syria was the Easterner that exploited the notion of feeling alone and abandoned even from friends during trials. See Isaac of Nineveh, *The Second Part: Chapters IV-XLI*, trans. Sebastian Brock, CSC 225 (1995), 8.21.

⁷⁵ Athanasius, *Trin*. PG 28,1264A: “ἦν ὁ Λόγος φωνῶν τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἴδια”.

⁷⁶ Athanasius, *Arian*. PG 26, 440: “οὐκ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, ἢ Λόγος”.

⁷⁷ Grillmeier focused on the notion of soul as a theological and anthropological factor in Byzantine Christology. With respect to Athanasius, Grillmeier tried to examine whether the soul was the physical subject of suffering at an anthropological level, or a theological factor that united the material (body) to the divine (Logos). See Grillmeier, *Christ*, 308cf. However, his analysis on Athanasian Christology within this context had had many pit-falls that were highlighted by various scholarly works. See Anatolios’ criticism of Grillmeier with respect to the notion of the Logos’ moving the body as an instrument. K. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998). For a more thorough discussion on the subject with regard to Grillmeier’s position see G. D. Dragas, ‘The Soul of Christ’, in *St. Athanasius: Contra Appolinarem*, Church and Theology 5 (Athens: Parisianos, 1985), 289-399 [especially pg. 344-356].

⁷⁸ For Grillmeier, the Athanasian refinement was meant to safeguard the divinity from personal involvement in the passion: the humanity became a sort of shield for the divinity. However, Dragas and most recently Gavrilyuk have critiqued such a reading of Athanasius and the Nicene faith in general. See Dragas, ‘The Soul of Christ’, 346ff: “(Quoting from Grillmeier) [Athanasius] had to find the subject of all suffering in the manhood of Christ, so as to put it as a protective shield before an inviolable Godhead”. Also Gavrilyuk, ‘Arianism Opposed’, in *Suffering*, 132.

Athanasius appropriated the notion that the Logos gave voice to the sufferings of human kind. For Jouassard, in Origen, this position was diminishing the personal involvement of Christ in the passion. But, according to the same scholar, when Athanasius was dealing with the same line of reasoning, this diminution of the Logos' involvement in the passion was removed: the Logos made his own the reality of the suffering human race. Christ accommodated such human nature that was able to experience the same passions (i.e. natural passions), with the rest of the human race.⁷⁹ When Christ was shrinking back and complaining that he was abandoned by God, “through this he was making known that, though he is God impassible, he has taken passible flesh; with his works he shows himself to be the Logos of God that then has become man”.⁸⁰ That led Athanasius to distinguish between natural operations that belonged to the Logos *qua* Logos, and actions/passions that belonged to the *oikonomia* of the union (ένώσεως οικονομία) between human and divine in Christ.⁸¹

For these (passions) are not the nature of the Logos *qua* Logos; for the Logos was in the flesh that was suffering those (passions)... and these were not spoken before the incarnation; but when the Logos became flesh, and he became man.⁸²

Athanasius' position was part of the process in patristic thought that argued the compatibility between natural passions and ethical purity. To achieve that, Athanasius distinguished between the status of the Logos before and after his incarnation.

In the same way that he trampled down death through his death, and all the human (afflictions), in this way he subdued our shrinking back through the assumed shrinking back.⁸³

Soteriology was Athanasius' crux: the Logos saved humanity by assuming human limitations. In doing so, Athanasius overturned the Arian argument that a saviour who was involved in human suffering would have endangered the divine impassibility. Athanasius brought his thought to a climax, swapping the

⁷⁹ Jouassard, 'L' Abandon', 612.

⁸⁰ Athanasius, *Arian*. PG 26, 437: “Έκ μέν γάρ τών τοιούτων εγνώριζεν, ότι, Θεός ών άπαθής, σάρκα παθητήν έλαβεν: εκ δέ τών έργων εδεικνυεν έαυτόν Λόγον όντα του Θεού, και ύστερον γενόμενον άνθρωπον”.

⁸¹ Jouassard, *ibid*, 610.

⁸² Athanasius, *ibid*, 437: “Άλλ' ούκ ήν ίδια φύσει του Λόγου ταύτα, ή Λόγος ήν: εν δέ τή τοιαύτα πασχούση σαρκί ήν ο Λόγος... Καί γάρ ούκ ειρηται ταύτα πρό τής σαρκός: άλλ' ότε ο Λόγος σάρξ εγένετο, και γέγονεν άνθρωπος”.

⁸³ Athanasius, *ibid*, 444: “Ως γάρ τόν θάνατον θανάτω κατήγησε, και ανθρώπινως πάντα τά ανθρώπινα, ούτω τή νομιζομένη δειλία την ήμών δειλίαν άφηρείτο”.

soteriological factors: “In the same way that, having become in our body he imitated our (condition), in the same way having taken him, we participate in his immortality”.⁸⁴ The Greek text presents a syntactic symmetry containing two dyads of one participle and a verb each: γενόμενος-ἐμιμήσατο and δεξάμενοι-μεταλαμβάνομεν. The Logos became a co-sufferer with humanity, and humanity was freed from its weakness and participated in Christ’s divinity. It was in his *Vita Antonii* that Athanasius exemplified the outcome of the incarnation through a vivid use of imagery.

However, Athanasius did not address the true subject and object of abandonment and most significantly the mechanism through which abandonment occurred: if Christ’s humanity was abandoned, then Athanasius did not explain whether it was abandoned by the Logos (i.e. the divine element in Christ) or the Father. This question has troubled modern scholarly research on Athanasian thought for the reason that it is related to the notion of Christ’s death. If abandonment is defined as separation, then did Athanasius support a separation between humanity and divinity in death? Such a position would have highlighted the separation between the Logos and the human element in Christ leaving unaddressed the role of the Father in the Passion. Grillmeier suggested of a separation between body and soul, doubting that the soul was a valid anthropological element in Athanasius. In this case, it is not the Father that abandons. The notion of separation is limited within the relationship between the Logos’ and his humanity. Athanasius never really provided an answer. The question remained open and became the backdoor for the appearance of Nestorianism.

For Dragas, Athanasius’ hesitation to answer the question concerning separation in death was due to the fact that Athanasius never saw himself involved with an analysis of the ontological mechanism that caused Christ’s passion and death. It seems that Athanasius only indicated that it was the Logos that suffered, without making Christ’s soul the subject of suffering. His position emphasised the involvement of the Logos in suffering, including the motif of abandonment.⁸⁵ Athanasius worked out the soteriological reasons that led to his abandonment. In doing this, he was cautious to meet his adversaries’ scepticism about the nature of the

⁸⁴ Athanasius, *op. cit.*: “Ὡς γὰρ αὐτός, γενόμενος ἐν τῷ ἡμῶν σώματι, τὰ ἡμῶν ἐμιμήσατο, οὕτως ἡμεῖς, δεξάμενοι αὐτόν, τῆς παρ’ ἐκείνου μεταλαμβάνομεν ἀθανασίας”.

⁸⁵ Dragas, ‘Christ’s Soul’, 350.

person that underwent abandonment. Athanasius' intention was to secure the divine state of the Logos, not to engage in a discussion of the inner mechanism that resulted in the loud cry.

His Arian interlocutors forced Athanasius to imply that the Logos was abandoned by the Father, but in a refined manner. Athanasius avoided such a trap but did not avoid introducing theological obscurity about the exact nature of Christ's abandonment on the cross. For Athanasius, abandonment meant separation. Origen had already dissociated abandonment from separation at the level of the *oikonomia*, understanding it in terms of the fall and its consequences. The Logos took on the consequences of the fall without changing his relation to the Father. Thus, Origen had introduced the notion of abandonment in terms of the Logos humility in mockery and contempt. The more elaborate Arian argument addressing the ontological condition of the Logos, left no space for Athanasius to turn to the Origenist ethical discussion. Instead, Athanasius met the Arian scepticism on their own territory, introducing the distinction between *oikonomia* and *theologia*: that is to say that Athanasius distinguished between the being of the Logos *qua* the Logos, and the being of the Logos in his incarnational status.⁸⁶

c. Gregory Nazianzen: typology or realism?

According to Jouassard, the Athanasian synthesis that brought together Origen's "realism" and "metaphorical system" was lost in the years following his theological legacy. In fact, Jouassard pointed to Gregory the Theologian as the representative of this disturbance. For Jouassard, Gregory offered an allegorical interpretation that endangered Christ's personal involvement in abandonment.⁸⁷

The only place that Gregory discussed Mt 27:46 was in the so-called *De Filio* of anti-Arian content. Like Athanasius, Gregory corresponded with his interlocutors'

⁸⁶ Athanasius introduced another exegetical line that presented Christ as the "fish-hook". This position was known since the time of Origen. It became a favourite for the two Cappadocian Gregories, whereas in the West Augustine altered it to the "mouse-trap". Athanasius, *Homilia de Passione et Cruce Domini*, PG 28,228. See J. Rivière, 'Le Marché avec le démon chez les Pères antérieurs à Saint Augustine', *RSR* 8 (1928), 257-270. Also D. F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, Patristic Monograph Series 7 (Cambridge MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 107. In Athanasius, this interpretation appeared only in homiletic works and highlighted the fact that every event in the life of Christ contributed to the defeat of death and the devil.

⁸⁷ Jouassard, 'L' Abandon', 612-613.

positions. It has been suggested –not without scepticism– that, for this work, Gregory actually corresponded to an Arian catena of scriptural witnesses, refuting them verse by verse.⁸⁸

In Mt 27:46 Gregory recognised the opening lines of Ps 21. With regard to the subject that experienced abandonment, Jouassard maintained that Gregory only appropriated the Origenist metaphorical system: Christ gave voice to the suffering of the human race.⁸⁹ According to Jouassard, such a position diminished the Athanasian achievement of showing the personal involvement of the Logos in the passion.

He is not forsaken either by the Father or by his own Godhead, as it seems to some, as if it is afraid of the passion, and for this reason it closes up to the sufferer. Who forced him to be born on earth in the first place or ascend on the cross? In himself, as I said, he is the type for us. For we were abandoned and disregarded before; and now we are assumed and saved through the suffering of the impassible.⁹⁰

Gregory followed the Athanasian position that distinguished between actions attributed to the Logos *qua* God and *qua* man.⁹¹ For Gregory, lowly names (e.g. slave) and actions, such as subordination and submission, belonged to the incarnate condition of the Logos. It is true that Gregory stressed the reality of Christ's humanity in vigorous terms:⁹² it was his humanity that was abandoned on the cross. Like Athanasius, Gregory did not develop an understanding of the inner mechanism in which Christ's humanity was abandoned. Athanasius dismissed the separation between the Logos and his Father, and Gregory followed suit. But Gregory also dismissed the position that the Logos' divinity abandoned his humanity. Thus, notwithstanding his vigorous language, Gregory maintained the singleness of the suffering subject.

⁸⁸ T. A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, vol. 2, Patristic Monograph Series 8 (Cambridge MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 502. Norris followed this argument though he questioned the order that Gregory followed when discussing the various scriptural verses: "The ordering is probably his (Gregory), the substance their (Eunomians)". F. W. Norris (ed.), *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen*, VgCh 13 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 55 and 159.

⁸⁹ Cf. J. A. McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood NY: SVS, 2001), 299: "[Gregory] argues that they (Mt 27:46) do not indicate anything of the mind of Christ considered either as God or as the man-God. They speak out, at the great moment of his act of salvation for the world, the entire plight of the human race alienated from the divinity".

⁹⁰ Nazianzene, *Fil. 5* [PG 36, 109B]: "οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸς εγκαταλείπεται, ἢ ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς, ἢ ὑπὸ τῆς αὐτοῦ θεότητος, ὃ δοκεῖ τισίν, ὡς ἂν φοβουμένης τὸ πάθος, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο συστελλομένης ἀπὸ τοῦ πάσχοντος. τίς γὰρ ἢ γεννηθῆναι κάτω τὴν ἀρχήν, ἢ ἐπὶ τὸν σταυρὸν ἀνελθεῖν ἠνάγκασεν; ἐν αὐτῷ δέ, ὅπερ εἶπον, τυποῖ τὸ ἡμέτερον. ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἡμεν οἱ εγκαταλελειμμένοι καὶ παρεωραμένοι πρότερον, εἶτα νῦν προσειλημμένοι καὶ σεσωσμένοι τοῖς τοῦ ἀπαθοῦς πάθεσιν".

⁹¹ Winslow, *Salvation*, 104.

⁹² According to Winslow, Gregory adopted a firmly and coherent unitive Christology only after confronting the Apollinarian positions. Winslow, *ibid*, 94.

That Gregory maintained the *accommodation* of the human passions by the Logos was taken by Jouassard as an indication of his typological interpretation: Christ was “called” sin and malediction, but his existence was never identified with the presence of sin. He was also called “abandoned” but, in reality, no real *separation* took place.⁹³ Christ only gave voice to the suffering of human kind without ever experiencing the passion (i.e. separation from the Father) of human race. Jouassard remarked on the sharp distinction between the condition of Christ on the cross and the condition of humankind: “he is not forsaken... by his own Godhead which closes up, afraid of suffering, and abandons the sufferer”.⁹⁴ For Norris, Gregory introduced a unitive Christology highlighting the singleness of the suffering subject: “now we are saved by the suffering of the impassible”.⁹⁵ Norris also suggested that Christ’s humanity did not play the role of a shield for his divinity.⁹⁶ What Jouassard viewed as typology was Gregory’s way to argue the need for full divine and also human involvement in the passion:

He honors obedience for this reason in practise and from his suffering he gains experience. For the disposition is not enough, as it is not enough in our case us, unless we give it practical effect. The deed is proof for the disposition. Probably it is not less to believe that he tastes our obedience and counts [or pays] everything through his passion in the art of loving mankind.⁹⁷

For Gregory, it was only through personal involvement in afflictions that the Logos freed humanity from her weakness. Such an argument meets any modern scepticism concerning his typology. Gregory was thinking of abandonment in real terms without deliberating on the mechanism in which it took place. At the end of the day, Gregory defended the natural divinity of the Logos in the light of soteriological presuppositions. This was the reason why Gregory employed a Christology that prepared the ground for the Christological controversies of the 5th century. However, Gregory was only working on the spirit of Nicaea (A.D. 325).⁹⁸ For Gregory, abandonment was a personal experience of Christ.

⁹³ Nazianzene, *Fil. op. cit.*

⁹⁴ Nazianzene, *Fil op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Nazianzene, *Fil op. cit.* Norris, *Faith*, 50 and 163ff.

⁹⁶ Norris, *ibid*, 50: “Humanity is not inserted into the equation so that divinity will be kept from full involvement”.

⁹⁷ Nazianzene, *Fil.* 6 [PG 36,109C]:“[δ]ιὰ τοῦτο ἔργῳ τιμᾷ τὴν ὑπακοήν, καὶ πειρᾶται ταύτης ἐκ τοῦ παθεῖν. οὐ γὰρ ἰκανὸν ἢ διάθεσις, ὡσπερ οὐδὲ ἡμῖν, εἰ μὴ καὶ διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων χωρήσαιμεν. ἔργον γὰρ ἀπόδειξις διαθέσεως. οὐ χεῖρον δὲ ἴσως κάκεινο ὑπολαβεῖν, ὅτι δοκιμάζει τὴν ἡμετέραν ὑπακοήν, καὶ πάντα μετρεῖ τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ πάθεσι τέχνη φιλανθρωπίας”.

⁹⁸ For Gregory’s Christology see Grillmeier, *Christ*, 368-370. Norris, *Faith*, 47-59. Winslow, *Salvation*, 73-119.

d. Gregory of Nyssa: the polemicist.

Basil of Caesarea: the ascetic

Gregory of Nyssa was not an exception in his treatment of the motif of abandonment in Christology. He only directed his attention to the episode when confronted with the Apollinarian position of a minimalist anthropology. However, Gregory did not directly correspond to Apollinarian exegesis on Mt 27:46. Gregory refuted Apollinarius' *Απόδειξις* without specifically addressing Apollinarian exegesis on Mt 27:46.

The only witnesses of Apollinarian exegesis on Mt 27:46 are found in fragments from exegetical catenas.⁹⁹ There is no indication –based on Lietzmann's edition– that Apollinarius used Mt 27:46 extensively within the context of his unitive Christology. For Behr, modern scholarship has appreciated Apollinarian Christology in the light of Apollinarius' defence of the Nicene faith and also his rejection of a divisive Christology that presented a loose union between the Godhead and a man (e.g. Diodore of Tarsus).¹⁰⁰

In his exegesis, Apollinarius followed the basic patristic direction of his era: it was not the Logos that was abandoned on the cross.¹⁰¹ Apollinarius' intention was to prevent an Arian understanding of the episode where the Logos was abandoned by the Father. In his defense, Apollinarius negated that the Logos was abandoned in

⁹⁹ See Mühlenberg (ed.), *Psalmenkommentare*, PTS 15 (1975), 3-118.

¹⁰⁰ See Olson, 'Apollinarius's "God-in-a-Body" Heresy', in *Christian Theology*, 207-208. Indeed, Apollinarius has refuted the divisive Christology of Diodore of Tarsus. See Behr, *Nicene Faith*, 2/2, 392. Cf. Gregory, *Apol.* 185 [1200] [all references in GNO 3.1]: "□Αλλ' ἡμᾶς φησι δύο πρόσωπα λέγειν, τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ προσληφθέντα ἄνθρωπον" ([quoting from Apollinarius] but we say, he says, of two persons, the God and the man assumed by God). Apollinarius understood *person* in terms of nature as the life-giving principle and the point of union in Christ. Thus, for him, the formula of two *natures* or two *persons* introduced two principles of union and also two life-giving sources. Harnack and Grillmeier noticed the Stoic understanding of the soul as the principle of life and motion permeating the whole human being in Apollinarius. Alongside his Nicene conviction, Apollinarius understood –in Stoic terms– that there was only one life-giving principle in Christ, the Logos. Otherwise, the union between God and flesh would have been loose. For the notion of nature (*φύσις*) and person (*πρόσωπον*) in Apollinarius see Grillmeier, 'Mia Physis' and 'The Concept of 'Person'', in *Christ*, 333-340. For the philosophical anthropological principles behind Apollinarius' thought which should not be exaggerated as his only theological drive see Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 149-163. Also, H. A. Wolfson, 'Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism', *DOP* 12 (1958), 5-28.

¹⁰¹ Apollinarius, *FrPs.* 28 [Ps. 37.22-23] [reference to fragments in PTS 15]: "τὸ Ἴνα τί εγκατέλειπές με; ὅπου δὲ τὸ Μὴ εγκαταλείπης με, καὶ τὸ Μὴ ἀποστῆς ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὡς ἐπ' αὐτοῦ γε τοῦτο ἀδύνατον" (the 'why have you abandoned me; or the 'do not abandon me'' and 'do not stand aloof from me' it is impossible to be by such one).

these terms.¹⁰² Overall, Apollinarius followed the Athanasian line of reasoning indicating natural phenomena as the testament about the unity between the Logos and his Father on the cross.¹⁰³ In stressing this union, Apollinarius employed a “typological” interpretation that excluded the personal involvement of the Logos. Thus, Apollinarius avoided the Athanasian and Gregorian distinctions between Christ’s actions *qua* Logos and *qua* man. Apollinarius dismissed concrete anthropological terms in Christology.¹⁰⁴ Athanasius and Gregory had implied that abandonment could refer to a “Logos-man” scheme.¹⁰⁵ Apollinarius rendered the notion of separation between the Logos and the Father as invalid. He wrote:

This [divine glory] is said to have changed into humility, when he came to the passion suffering what was for the sake of men and being abandoned by them for whom he was suffering¹⁰⁶

For Apollinarius, abandonment did not imply a disturbance of the relationship between the Logos and his Father. Christ was abandoned in terms of the people that disregarded him and crucified him. However, Apollinarian Christology was not as innocent as it appeared.¹⁰⁷

In his *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*, Gregory attacked the above

¹⁰² Apollinarius, *FrPs. op. cit.*: “Ὁὐ γάρ εἰμι, φησὶν, μόνος, ἐπεὶ ὁ πατήρ μου μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστίν” (For I am not alone, he says, because my Father is with me).

¹⁰³ Apollinarius, *FrPs.* 53 [Ps. 42.2]: “□Επὶ δὲ τοῦ κυρίου παντελῶς τὸ ἵνα τί εγκατέλιπές με λέγεται, ὅταν καὶ τὸ κατ’ αὐτὸν οὐκ ἄξιον εγκαταλείψεως: διὸ καὶ ταχεῖα ἡ τῆς οὐρανοῦ βοηθείας ἐπιφάνεια περὶ τῷ πάσχοντι σώματι δι’ ἐκεῖνο περὶ ἡμῶς” (It is not said for the Lord the ‘why have you abandoned me’, when what is according to him is not rendered to be worthy of abandonment; therefore, it is immediate the manifestation of the heavenly assistance for him who suffered through this body for us).

¹⁰⁴ Apollinarius’ debate with Diodore of Tarsus is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration when assessing his Christology. His argument was shaped according to the position of his interlocutor even if this fact brought his positions close to the Arian diminution of Christ’s humanity. Apollinarius knew that his Christology was different from that of the Arians in the sense that, in his model, the Logos was the life-giving principle as fully divine.

¹⁰⁵ I have used this expression with due caution. Athanasian and Gregorian interpretation were different in many respects from the later development of Antiochene Christology that resulted in Nestorianism. Their purpose was not to exemplify the relation between the human and divine in Christ, but rather to safeguard the fact that Christ, as fully divine, truly assumed human limitations.

¹⁰⁶ Apollinarius, *FrPs.* 148 [Ps. 87.16b]: “ταύτην εἰς ταπεινώσιν μεταβεβλήσθαι φησιν, ἥνικα εἰς τὸ παθεῖν ἐλήλυθε πάσχων τὰ ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων καὶ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ὑπὲρ ὧν ἐπάσχεν εγκαταλιπόμενος”.

¹⁰⁷ For Apollinarius, it was the body that accepted the passion. Christ’s humanity was called the “passive part” of the Logos. The passion belonged to Christ’s humanity only to the degree that there was a presence of the human element in the “commingling” of divinity and humanity --what Grillmeier called the *compositum* ‘Christ’. Indeed, Gregory accused Apollinarius that he made Christ another substance (neither God nor man) that was the result of mingling divinity and the lower functions of humanity. See Grillmeier, *Christ*, 329. Despite Harnack’s attempt to exaggerate the Apollinarian Christological achievement --remarked by Grillmeier--, nevertheless, he presented a fair exposition of Apollinarian Christology. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 149-163. Behr, ‘A “Nicene Opponent: Apollinarius of Laodicea”’, in *Nicene Faith*, 2/2, 379-401.

Apollinarian line of reasoning. Behind the Apollinarian argument Gregory discerned the theory of a “middle-being” –as Grillmeier designated it– that suffered on the cross.¹⁰⁸

Who cried out being abandoned by God, if the divinity of the Father and the Son is one? And from whom does abandonment occur which (i.e. abandonment) he cried out on the cross?¹⁰⁹

Gregory believed that abandonment meant separation; hence his inquiry about the subject of the abandonment. Gregory presented a “pro-Nestorian” position concerning the human reality in Christ.¹¹⁰ Gregory argued that, it was absurd – indeed– to believe that such separation belonged to the relationship between the Logos and the Father:

If it is the Godhead that is the suffering, the faithful have claim that the Son is of one essence with the Father —he says the one who suffers, my God my God why have you abandoned me?— how is it, when it is one, that the Godhead is divided during the passion and the one abandons, and the other is left?¹¹¹

It was the Nicene notion of the Logos’ consubstantiality with the Father that informed Gregory’s interpretation. Gregory was well aware of the Arian scepticism concerning the divine state of the Son. For Gregory, Apollinarius hesitated to acknowledge a suffering humanity in Christ. That led to the absurdity of a passible God. In case Apollinarius insisted that the suffering belonged to the Logos, then Apollinarius could jeopardise the natural union between Father and Son (Arianism).¹¹² In any case, Gregory rejected the unflexible unitive Apollinarian Christology. The passion belonged to the Logos but only in his incarnational state.

What Gregory really objected to was the Apollinarian notion of Christ as a “heavenly man”.¹¹³ Gregory did not intend to argue Christ’s humanity as a second active subject in Christ.¹¹⁴ According to Behr’s observation, Gregory’s intention was

¹⁰⁸ Grillmeier, *Christ*, 332. Gregory, *Apol.* 133 [1128].

¹⁰⁹ Gregory, *ibid*, 168 [1176]: “τίς ὁ ἐγκαταλελειφθῆναι παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ βοήσας, εἰ μία θεότης πατὴρ καὶ υἱός; καὶ παρὰ τίνος ἡ ἐγκατάλειψις γίνεται, ἢν ἐπὶ τῷ σταυρῷ ἐξεφώνησεν;”.

¹¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of Gregory’s objections to Apollinarian Christology see Behr, ‘Contemplating the Eternal Christ’, in *Nicene Faith*, 2.2/451-458.

¹¹¹ Gregory, *Apol.* 168 [1176]: “εἰ γὰρ τὸ πάσχον ἡ θεότης, μῖα δὲ εἶναι θεότητος τῷ πατρὶ τὸν υἱὸν οἱ εὐσεβοῦντες συντίθενται –φησὶ δὲ ὁ πάσχων ὅτι Θεέ μου, θεέ μου, ἵνα τί με ἐγκατέλιπες;- πῶς μία οὐσα ἡ θεότης ἐν τῷ πάθει μερίζεται καὶ ἡ μὲν καταλείπει, ἡ δὲ καταλείπεται”.

¹¹² Gregory, *Apol.* 137 [1133].

¹¹³ B. E. Daley, ‘‘Heavenly Man’ and ‘Eternal Christ’: Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2002), 469-488.

¹¹⁴ Historically, such a position was never addressed until the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy.

to expose the Apollinarian discontinuity between Christ's humanity and the human race. It is certain that –unlike Grillmeier's comment– Gregory had full knowledge of what Apollinarius truly meant by the “heavenly man”. In fact, Gregory elaborated a rhetorical manoeuvre to ridicule it,¹¹⁵ discerning Apollinarius' hesitation to attribute natural passions to Christ's humanity. For Gregory, such passions testified to the reality of the incarnation, indicating the full degree to which the Logos assumed real humanity.¹¹⁶ Attributing such passions to a “middle-being” endangered the reality of the incarnation.

Even though Gregory exposed the Apollinarian illogicality, he did not provide an analysis of the mechanism of abandonment. Gregory followed the Athanasian line of reasoning: the Father did not abandon the Logos. For Gregory, the loud cry was an indication of separation. Yet, Gregory did not define the subject of this separation. He believed that: i) the Logos *qua* Logos was not abandoned by the Father;¹¹⁷ ii) the Logos remained united with his humanity and the body. The Logos was the life-giving principle that ensured the union between body and soul.¹¹⁸ Thus, the Logos

But, the problem of how one referred to a full divinity and humanity in Christ without introducing two active subjects remained unsolved even beyond the time of Chalcedon and the neo-Chalcedonian model of Christ in the 6th-century. Bathrellos' introduction to the theology of Maximus is a good historical survey of the problem providing a valid review of the bibliography on this matter. Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*. Also Grillmeier's contribution is monumental: Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. S. Coakley, 'What does Chalcedon Solve and what does it not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian Definition', in S. Davis et al. (eds.), *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 143-163. I. R. Torrance, *Christology after Chalcedon: Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1988). R. C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: OUP, 1976). P. T. R. Gray, 'Leontius of Jerusalem's Case for a 'Synthetic' Union in Christ', *SP* 18 (1985), 151-154. N. Madden, 'Composite Hypostasis in Maximus the Confessor', *SP* 26 (1993), 175-197. B. E. Daley, '“A Richer Union”: Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ', *SP* 24 (1993), 239-265.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Gregory, *Apol.* 148 [1148].

¹¹⁶ For Gregory, natural passions were not necessary for the being of the Logos but only in the sense that he followed the natural accordance. Gregory, *Apol.* 231 [1265-1268].

¹¹⁷ Gregory, *Apol.* 137 [1133].

¹¹⁸ Gregory, *Apol.* 153 [1156]: “ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ σώματι καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτὸν ἐπιμερίσας διὰ μὲν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνοίγει τῷ ληστῇ τὸν παράδεισον, διὰ δὲ τοῦ σώματος ἴστησι τῆς φθορᾶς τὴν ἐνέργειαν” (but dividing himself in the body and the soul, with the soul he opens Paradise to the thief, and with the body he stops the action of corruption). In his *On Soul and the Resurrection (De Anima et Resurrectione)*, Gregory had shown that it was the soul that remained the connecting link between itself and the material elements from which the body is composed. However, at this instance, Gregory shifted his position. It was not by means of the soul that corruption was prevented, but thanks to the presence of the Logos in the body. For a discussion over Gregory's anthropology with respect to the connection between the soul and the soul's life in the body see Williams, 'Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion', 227-247. G. S. Stead, 'Individual Personality in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa', in U. Bianchi and H. Crouzel (eds.), *Arché e Telos: L' Anthropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa*, *Studia Patristica Mediolanensia* 12 (Milan: Univ. Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1981), 170-191. Stead

never abandoned his humanity or the body. Grillmeier was right to observe the diminution of the anthropological role of the soul in Cappadocian thought. The only separation that Gregory did not deny –he did not assert it either– was the Platonic separation between body and soul during death. If this is the case, then, it remains a mystery why Christ cried out “My God, my God” during this separation since there was no true separation between humanity and divinity.

Even more laconic than his junior brother was Basil. Basil discussed the motif in an unexpected context: asceticism. In his work *Regulae Morales*, Basil had addressed eighty principles for Christian asceticism.¹¹⁹ The sixty fifth *Rule* reads thus: “that we need to pray for what is suitable even at the time of death”.¹²⁰ Basil provided the necessary scriptural backup for his principle, citing Mt 27:46, Lk 23:46 and Ac 7:58-59. Basil did not comment on the verses. For Basil, the loud cry in Mt 27:46 was a faithful prayer: in fact, Mt 27:46 was a recantation of Ps. 21:1. Christ gave his loud cry according to the type of lamentation psalms in the Old Testament. Out of the context of theological polemics, Basil showed the value of the loud cry for the ascetic soul: it was a faithful prayer. Basil reflected on a patristic position that illustrated Christ as an example of life for the faithful. Such a position found its fullest expression in John Damascene’s notion of “ὑπογραμμός”.¹²¹

e. Didymos the blind: the technical foundations

According to Jouassard’s examination, Didymos presented a “typological” understanding of the loud cry on the cross: Christ cried out as an intercessor that

indicated the presence of a personal element that guaranteed the union between soul and body at the resurrection.

¹¹⁹ According to Fedwick, the work belonged to the period A.D. 363-378 when Basil composed most of his *Homilies*. See P. J. Fedwick, ‘A Chronology of the Life and Works of Basil of Caesarea’, in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981), 3-19.

¹²⁰ Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae Morales*, 65 [PG 31, 804C]: “Ὅτι δεῖ καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἐξόδῳ προσεύχεσθαι τὰ πρέποντα”.

¹²¹ The origin of the term was scriptural: 1Pe 2:21. Origen developed the motif in the context of the ethical appropriation of Christ’s example. Origen, *Excerpta in Psalmos*, PG 17, 109 [Ps. 16:4]. See R. A. Layton, ‘Propatheia: Origen and Didymos on the Origin of the Passions’, *VgCh* 54, no. 3 (2000), 269: “Origen turns Jesus agony into both a didactic opportunity and an indication of Jesus’ full participation in human nature”. Interestingly, with the exception of John Chrysostom, the motif was favoured by the Alexandrians. Athanasius, *De Virginitate*, 3.20 [if it is Athanasius’ work]. Didymos, *In Psalmos 29-34*, 160.8 [Ps. 31:2 in PTA 8]. Cyril, *ComJn*, PG 74, 92C. Cf. Maximus, *Thal.* 65 [PG 90, 770]. Damascene, *ExpF.* 68.

appropriated the passion of others in his person.¹²² For Jouassard, Didymos depicted Christ primarily in terms of his ethical purity: “In such purity of being”, Christ did not experience true abandonment. The latter motif was associated with sinfulness.¹²³

Indeed, Didymos followed Origen in his interpretation: Christ maintained his ethical purity. However, Didymos introduced the fullness of Christ’s humanity, and also his closeness to humankind. Jouassard overlooked the fact that Didymos was defending the existence of a rational soul in Christ against the Apollinarians. For Grillmeier, Didymos returned to the Origenist position of highlighting Christ’s soul as an anthropological factor. If Didymos had accommodated only a “typological” interpretation, then his exegesis would not have been different than that of Apollinarius. In his defence against Apollinarianism, Didymos was the first author that developed a technical vocabulary in order to shed light on the nature of natural passions.¹²⁴ That is to say that Didymos was the first to discuss the accommodation of human conditions without endangering Christ’s ethical purity.

The Alexandrian scholar employed the Origenist ethical distinction between *passion* and *pro-passion* (πάθος-προπάθεια).¹²⁵ Grillmeier commented on the neo-Platonic anthropology of Didymos with regard to this matter.¹²⁶ However, Layton demonstrated the Stoic origins of Didymos’ theory. For Layton, Origen had already introduced the motif in his ethical thought.¹²⁷ Thus, Didymos found it in Origen, and further exemplified the way in which the scriptures presented human passions in Christ –such as shrinking back from fear. His intention was to dissociate natural passions from sin.¹²⁸ Despite the fact that Didymos’ thought did not lead

¹²² Cf. Didymos, *In Psalmos 20-21*, 25,17 [Ps. 21.1 in PTA 7]. Indeed, for Didymos, Christ uttered the loud cry as the head of the suffering body. But, this is not to say that Didymos believed in a “docetic” –i.e. relative– accommodation of human sufferings –as Jouassard suggested.

¹²³ Jouassard, “L’Abandon”, 615.

¹²⁴ Grillmeier, ‘The Alexandrian Development of a Christological Psychology’, in *Christ*, 361-367.

¹²⁵ Didymos, *Eccl 7-8:8*, 221.21 [Eccl 7:20 in PTA 16]. Didymos, *In Psalmos 20-21*, 43.16 [Ps 21:21 in PTA 7]. It is not quite clear how this distinction could work in real psychological terms for Didymos. It seems that according to Didymos, the latter term (i.e. προπάθεια) defines the condition when a passion is only a thought. At that time the soul has not given her consent to the execution of the passion. When the soul has reached the condition of πάθος then the soul has consented to the execution of a passion and the latter has taken place.

¹²⁶ Grillmeier, *Christ*, 363.

¹²⁷ Layton, ‘Propatheia’, 262-282.

¹²⁸ Didymos, *Eccl 11-12*, 337.24 [Eccl 11:10 in PTA 9].

anywhere,¹²⁹ Layton acknowledged that Didymos put into fore the fact that Christ shared limitations and sufferings with the rest of humankind in a genuine way.¹³⁰

Unlike what Jouassard has suggested, Didymos appropriated Ps 21:1 for Christ: i.e. David's offspring "that was born according to the flesh".¹³¹ Didymos introduced a distinction peculiar to his interpretation: Christ was abandoned according to the "logoi of transgressions" (λόγοι παραπτωμάτων), not the "transgressions" (παραπτώματα).¹³² According to Didymos' thought, this distinction exemplified the reason that caused abandonment: the Alexandrian scholar related the multifaceted *logoi* as connoting the *results* that transgressions caused on humankind. Christ experienced the results, not the transgressions as such. In introducing such a distinction, Didymos i) affirmed the reality of Christ's abandonment; ii) emphasised Christ's closeness to human sufferings; and iii) he maintained the unique identity and ethical purity of the suffering subject.¹³³ However, his theory could only make sense in the context of the Athanasian distinction between the actions of the Logos before and after the incarnation.

In his *De Trinitate*,¹³⁴ Didymos reinforced the motif of a co-suffering Christ. This time he discussed the reason that Christ was abandoned. Didymos followed Gregory of Nazianzus' dictum: "quod non est assumptum non est sanatum".¹³⁵ In his sufferings, Christ experienced the weakness of the human nature according to the natural "accordance" (ἀκολουθία).¹³⁶ Thus, Didymos introduced the link between abandonment and natural accordance. Having separated abandonment from sin, for

¹²⁹ For Layton, Didymos shifted his argument from the Stoic and Origenist notion of *propassio* as addressing the external stimuli to the concept of *passio* in terms of human deliberation and assent. Though he introduced the involvement of human disposition and deliberation into the argument, Didymos did not demonstrate the exact line that distinguishes between *passio* and *propassio*, or the way in which the notion of human disposition was not linked to sin. See Layton, 'Propatheia', 2281-282. Cf. Didymos, *In Psalmos 20-21*, 25.6-8 [Ps 21.2 in PTA 7]; abandonment was caused by the lost of one's initial disposition. However, Didymos did not indicate how this notion included Christ's case.

¹³⁰ As Layton put it, "Didymos needed to show that the psychic event gave sure proof of human rational functions in the Incarnation". Layton, 'Propatheia', 276.

¹³¹ Didymos, *FrPs.* 175 [Ps. 21:1].

¹³² Didymos, *FrPs.* 176 [Ps. 21:2a].

¹³³ Grillmeier has observed that Didymos has maintained the Alexandrian identification of the suffering subject primarily as the Logos, however, introducing a coherent psychological basis in his analysis that shows a creative integration of "Alexandrian" and "Antiochene" Christologies.

¹³⁴ Didymos, *Trin.* PG 39, 904A.

¹³⁵ "What is not assumed is not saved".

¹³⁶ Didymos, *Trin.* PG 39, 901B.

Didymos, Christ assumed on himself the *results* of sin. Such results defined what the humanity is.¹³⁷

That he (Christ) condescended in everything, being in poverty in the form of the servant, and refashioning according to the word himself without change into the common (nature) and keeping the natural accordance of the incarnation, without destroying the reality of the character (incarnation).¹³⁸

Didymos accommodated the Irenaean defence of showing Christ's true incarnation as manifested through passions that were according to the human nature that he assumed.

How would we know that, according to what is written, he lifted our weaknesses on the holy cross, so that through it he offered a better condition to men, if before that, in the way that he knows, he did not assume them on him and show them?¹³⁹

Overall, Didymos seems to support that Christ “felt” or “experienced” abandonment, without ever experiencing it in terms of *separation*. Didymos did not discuss the actual subject that abandoned Christ on the cross. Was it the Father?¹⁴⁰ The Alexandrian exegete exploited the Athanasian distinction between experiencing abandonment *qua* humanity, and also the Origenist notion of Christ's soul as the link between the humanity and divinity.¹⁴¹ Didymos defended the *natural* character of abandonment against the Apollinarian application of a *typological* reading. He argued the continuity between Christ's suffering and the humankind, further expressing the patristic scepticism concerning abandonment: what lies at the core of divine abandonment is sin. Abandonment was the result of the fall. Didymos

¹³⁷ For Layton, according to Didymos, “*propatheia* is a proof of nature, not a quality which produces moral defect or virtue”. Layton, ‘Propatheia’, 273. Didymos connected the event on the cross to Christ's shrinking back in Gethsemane. See Didymos, *In Psalmos 20-21*, 43.20 [Ps 21: 21 in PTA 7].

¹³⁸ Didymos, *Trin.* PG 39, 901B: “ἀλλ’ ὅτι κἀνατῶθα συγκαταβάς εἰς πάντα, καὶ πτωχεύων τῆ τοῦ δούλου μορφῇ, καὶ μεταπλάσας τῷ λόγῳ ἑαυτὸν ἀτρέπτως εἰς τὸ κοινόν, καὶ πᾶσαν τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως ἀκολουθίαν φυλάττων, καὶ μηδὲν τοῦ χαρακτήρος τῆς ἀληθείας ἀφανίζων”. For Didymos, poverty did not define abandonment, as it was the case with Origen. However, Didymos brought into play the motif of *kenosis* to show the continuity between Christ's suffering and human experience.

¹³⁹ Didymos, *Trin.* PG 39,904A: “Πῶς γὰρ ἂν ἐπληροφορήθημεν, ὅτι τὰς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν, κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον, εἰς τὸν τίμιον ἀνήνεγκε σταυρὸν, ὥστε διὰ τούτου κρεῖττονα παρασχεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις κατάστασιν, εἰ μὴ πρότερον αὐτὰς, καθ’ ὃν οἶδε τρόπον, εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀνέλαβέ τε καὶ ἔδειξεν”.

¹⁴⁰ Didymos. *In Psalmos 20-21*. 25.6-9 [Ps 21:2 in PTA 7]: God abandons an individual when the latter has abandoned his own disposition.

¹⁴¹ For Didymos' Christology see Grillmeier, *Christ*, 361-367. Also A. Gesché, *La Christologie du commentaire sur les Psaumes découverte à Toura*, Universitas Catholica Loveniensis Dissertationes 7 (Gembloux : J. Duculot, 1962), 71-90. Guérard, ‘Didyme d'Alexandrie’, in Nil, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, 41-42. P. C. Bouteneff, ‘Placing the Christology of Didymus the Blind’, *SP* 37 (2001), 389-395. J. Lebon, ‘S. Athanase a-t-il employé l'expression κυριακός ἀνθρώπος?’, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 31 (1935), 307-329.

distinguished between cause and result. He also indicated the various ethical levels in which human passions function. Didymos' intention was to show the *natural* character that passions acquired after the fall without discussing the mechanism of abandonment. Abandonment initially resulted due to sin (i.e. the fall). In this present life, it has become an integral part of human nature without introducing sin, as such, since now it is a "result" of the initial corruption that sin brought to human nature. Didymos denied the bond between sin and abandonment. As a result of the initial corruption of human nature, abandonment could occur without necessarily resulting from sin that has been acted by the subject. In discussing abandonment in terms of natural passions, Didymos removed the question concerning divine theodicy: abandonment was part of human nature; it was not caused by an active sin.

However, the subject that abandoned (e.g. Father?) and the true object that was abandoned on the cross (e.g. humanity?) remained uncertain in his thought. What Didymos achieved was to provide the necessary thought and vocabulary that would lead to the clear distinction of later Patristic literature (i.e. Maximus-Damascene) between "natural properties" and "sinful passions".

f. Epiphanius of Salamis: the anti-Arian/Apollinarian rigorist.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, a contemporary of Didymos, Epiphanius of Salamis, tried to provide insights into divine abandonment with regard to the subject of the experience. Like Didymos, the Cypriot bishop was preoccupied with opposing Arianism and Apollinarianism.

In his defence against the Arians, Epiphanius was following Athanasius and the Nicene theology.¹⁴² Indeed, Epiphanius dismissed any separation between Father and Son:

When was a son abandoned by the father, when was not the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son? The Son was on earth, and the Logos, the God, was walking, but he was touching upon the heavens... he was inside Mary and became man, and he was filling the cosmos with his power. How is it possible that he and such a one was desperately saying according to his divinity "Eli Eli"?¹⁴³

¹⁴² Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.19.5 [GCS 3/168] and 69.63.1 [GCS 3/211-212].

¹⁴³ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.63.6 [GCS 3/212]: "πότε γὰρ εγκατελείφθη υἱὸς ἀπὸ πατρὸς, πότε δὲ οὐχ ὁ υἱὸς ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν υἱῷ; ἐπὶ γῆς μὲν γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς λόγος βεβήκει, οὐρανοῦ δὲ ἤπτετο... καὶ ἐν Μαρίας ἐτύγγανε καὶ ἄνθρωπος ἐγένετο, ἀλλὰ τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ

The Nicene line of reasoning was arguing the natural unity between Father and Son. Epiphanius pointed out the unity of the active/suffering subject with his Father by highlighting two conditions of Christ's being: i) Christ in his unity with the Father; and ii) Christ in his incarnate condition. Like Athanasius, Epiphanius distinguished between the two conditions of Christ's being (*theologia-oikonomia*). For Epiphanius, it was Christ's humanity that was abandoned by God, since the passion was rendered to the incarnate condition of Christ. At the level of the *theologia*, the relationship between the Father and the Son remained undisturbed by the passion.

Ps 15:10 was Epiphanius' proof text that Christ's soul was not abandoned in Hades: the unity between soul and divinity remained unbroken.¹⁴⁴ The resurrection gave evidence to this unity: because of her unity with the divinity, the soul was not taken over by death.¹⁴⁵ But, if abandonment signified separation, who was separated by whom? Epiphanius excluded the separation between Father and Son, and also divinity and soul. He was left with the option that the body was separated by the soul:

His incarnation... seeing that the divinity together with the soul was already moving to leave behind the holy body, utters this at the person of the dominical man, i.e. his incarnation.¹⁴⁶

On the cross, Christ experienced death. Before dying, the body felt the departure of the soul. Epiphanius was following the classical definition of death as separation between body and soul:

If it is impossible that he was left because of the divinity how could it be uttered from the person of the divinity: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me"? But this word was shown [to be] from the person of his incarnation according to human passions... so what was in the tomb was the body, and the soul departed

ἐπλήρου τὰ σύμπαντα. πῶς οὖν ὁ τοιοῦτος καὶ τηλικούτος κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ θεότητα οἰκτρῶς ἔλεγεν "ἤλί, ἤλί".

¹⁴⁴ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.64.4-5 [GCS 3/213]: "οὐκ ἔασεις τὴν ψυχὴν μου εἰς Ἄϊδην, οὐδὲ δώσεις τὸν ὄσιόν σου ἰδεῖν διαφθοράν". οὔτε γὰρ κατέλιπεν ὁ ἅγιος θεὸς λόγος τὴν ψυχὴν οὔτε ἐγκατελείφθη ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν Ἄϊδι" ('for you will not leave my soul in Hades; neither will you suffer your holy one to see corruption'. Neither had the holy divine Logos left alone the soul, nor was his soul abandoned in Hades).

¹⁴⁵ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.64.4-5 [GCS 3/213]. Epiphanius viewed the soul as bait for death: death approached the soul, but he suddenly found the divinity hiding behind the soul.

¹⁴⁶ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.64.2 [GCS 3/213]: "ἡ γὰρ αὐτοῦ ἐνανθρώπησις... ὀρώσα ἤδη τὴν θεότητα σὺν τῇ ψυχῇ κινουμένην ἐπὶ τὸ καταλεῖψαι τὸ ἅγιον σῶμα ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τοῦ κυριακοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τούτεστι τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσεως προεβάλετο". For the notion of the "dominical man" in the Arian controversies, Grillmeier's contribution remains irreplaceable. Grillmeier pointed to the Marcellan origin of the term and its subsequent use by the Nicene party. See Grillmeier, *Christ*, 287ff. According to Grillmeier, the term referred to the glorified state of Christ's humanity without introducing a distinct active subject.

together with the divine Logos.¹⁴⁷

Epiphanius was careful enough to maintain the unity between the humanity and divinity even in death. The indication that it was the “dominical man” that cried out Mt 27:46 was a theological device to secure the unity between body and divinity. The body was still part of the incarnation. Thus, it was not left in the tomb alone: it remained the body of the incarnation. For Epiphanius, “neither was the incarnate presence abandoned during the passion”.¹⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa had indicated that it was the presence of the Godhead that prevented the corruption of the body. Epiphanius followed suit. For Epiphanius, it was not the Godhead that abandoned the body, as the Apollinarians might have suggested. Origen and Didymos highlighted the presence of the soul in Christ. Epiphanius diminished the role of the soul in Christ: it was the Logos that secured the unity between the humanity and divinity. It was only the soul that was separated from the body: the Logos remained united with the soul and the body. In Epiphanius’ thought, Christ became a co-sufferer with the human race. His suffering was a “proof” –to borrow from Layton– for the reality of his human nature. Epiphanius highlighted abandonment as the separation between body and soul in rigorous terms, emphasising that Christ assumed natural passions.¹⁴⁹

g. Cyril of Alexandria: the Nestorian outbreak.

In the years following the outbreak of the Arian controversy, theological deliberation on the “loud cry” had taken on the form of refusing the application of such experience to Christ *qua* God by the Nicene party. In most cases, the rigorous presentation of a “concrete” human element was devised in order to remove any suspicions concerning divine passibility. But, it was noticed that, the theological obscurity of the Nicene faith inevitably brought to the fore the Nestorian understanding of humanity as a distinct active subject in the incarnation.

In his exegesis, Nestorius was unwilling to attribute the loud cry to the Logos

¹⁴⁷ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.66.1ff [GCS 3/214]. Also in 69.63.4 [GCS 3/212] and 69.66.3-4 [GCS 3/214]: “εἰ δὲ ἀδύνατον ἦν κατασχεθῆναι διὰ τὴν θεότητα, πῶς ἄρα ἐκ προσώπου τῆς αὐτοῦ θεότητος ἠδύνατο ρηθῆναι τὸ “θεέ μου, θεέ μου, ἵνα τί εγκατέλιπές με;” ἀλλ’ οὗτος ἐκ προσώπου τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσεως ἀνθρωποπαθῶς εἰδείκνυτο ὁ λόγος... σῶμα δὲ ἄρα τὸ ἐν τῷ μνήματι, [καὶ] ἡ ψυχὴ δὲ συναπῆλθε τῷ θεῷ λόγῳ”.

¹⁴⁸ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 69.42.4 [GCS 3/190]. According to Rossé, for Epiphanius, the divinity abandoned the humanity Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 76.

¹⁴⁹ Epiphanius, *Anchoratus*, 33.4ff [GCS 1/42]. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 2.3.2ff [GCS 1/230].

qua God. It was the son of Mary that was abandoned on the cross. Nestorius provided a literal understanding of abandonment in terms of separation which he viewed in the relation between Logos-man. According to McGuckin and Gavrilyuk, Nestorius had two theological drives: i) a reaction to Apollinarian human minimalism and, ii) the maintenance of divine impassibility.¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately, Nestorius' thought has only been preserved in fragments edited by Abramovski, and also in extracts from his works that were included in the *Acts* of Ephesus (A.D. 431). Nestorius was unwilling either to attribute abandonment to the Logos or diminish the reality of the abandonment. In arguing divine impassibility and also the authenticity of the experience, Nestorius applied abandonment to the relationship between human and divine in Christ. Who was abandoned on the cross was the man, i.e. a collaborator in the divinity (θείας αὐθεντίας συνεργός).¹⁵¹ Nestorius asked: "if he was crucified due to weakness, who was weak, you heretic? The Logos the God?"¹⁵² According to Nestorius, it was the man with whom the Logos was united (συνάφεια) that experienced weakness, natural passions, and was abandoned on the cross.¹⁵³ After the outbreak of the controversy, the Nestorian party was accusing the Cyrillian party of confusing the natures and ascribing passibility to the divine nature.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ In ACO 1.1.6/11: "ἄκουσον δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ θανάτου, εἰ ἔστι ποτὲ κείμενος ὁ θεός, ἵνα παθητὸν τὸν θεὸν εἰσαγάγωμεν. ἐχθροί, φησὶν, ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. οὐκ εἶπε διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου" (listen also that in death, if it is that God was lying [at the tomb], so that we infer that God is passible. Though we were enemies, it says, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son. He did not say through the death of Logos the God). Cf. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril*, 130. Gavrilyuk, *Suffering*, 141. Grillmeier, *Christ*, 451. In late antiquity, the problem of divine impassibility was linked to the early accusations of patripassianism (e.g. Noetius). Gavrilyuk has criticised Harnack's position that the problem of patripassianism was never a real issue for Christian theology. Especially during the Arian controversy, patripassianism was rejected in the face of Sabellius. Any strict unitive Christology and Trinitarian theology that argued the "personal" involvement of the Logos *qua* God in the passion was suspicious of introducing the participation of the Father in the passion. This fact reflects in the Arian diminution of the ontological status of the Logos. On the other hand, any diminution of the involvement of the Logos in the passion was putting under question the manner in which salvation was brought upon the human race by a divine agent. If the participation of the Logos was relative, then, it was an open question how a man transformed the human passions. Gregory of Nyssa provided the most insightful discussion on this matter in his *Contra Apollinarium*, and also Gregory Nazianzen in his *Ad Cledonium*. Gavrilyuk has presented the most coherent analysis of the subject addressing the span from the Arian controversies to the Nestorian outbreak. Gavrilyuk, 'Patripassian Controversy Resolved: The Son, not the Father Suffered in the Incarnation', in *Suffering*, 91-100. It is characteristic that even in the Arian controversies one party was accusing the other party of either patripassianism or the heresy of Paul of Samosata who had introduced two distinct active subjects in Christ.

¹⁵¹ In ACO 1.1.2/49.

¹⁵² In ACO 1,1.6/12. Nestorius provided a chain of syllogisms to show Cyril's absurdity in introducing weakness and death as qualities attributed to the Logos. For Nestorius, Cyril had subjected the divine to passibility.

¹⁵³ In ACO 1,1.6.12.

¹⁵⁴ Abramowski (ed.), *Nestorian Collection*, 43, 68, 84 and 118.

It is clear that Cyril of Alexandria gained an interest in the motif of abandonment only as part of his defence –or attack, in many cases– against Nestorius.¹⁵⁵ In the early stages of his exegetical career –i.e. prior to A.D. 428– Cyril had shown no interest in the significance of the loud cry on the cross. It is indicative of this, that in his extensive commentary *In Matthæum*, he had overlooked the loud cry, turning his attention to the sudden darkness and also Christ’s final words. The episode only attracted his attention in his polemical works: twice he responded to Nestorius’ scepticism quoting directly from the latter (*Adversus Nestorium*). Cyril’s intention was to fully expose the weakness of Nestorian divisive Christology.¹⁵⁶

So far, it has been indicated that, prior to the Nestorian outbreak, Patristic literature left an obscure possibility that abandonment as separation could apply to the relationship between the Godhead and manhood. Nestorius seems to have drawn this conclusion: abandonment could apply to the relation between God and man.¹⁵⁷

The Nicene faith had shown that the only option open was to apply separation between the Logos and the Son of Mary. Cyril felt that Nestorius had explored such an option by breaking the unity between the Godhead and manhood. Cyril acquired another theological position: the loud cry, *qua* action, belonged to the Logos incarnate; i.e. the Logos in his humanity.¹⁵⁸ In order to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of either acknowledging divine passibility¹⁵⁹ or Apollinarian minimalism, Cyril denied the definition of the loud cry as a desperate cry in abandonment. For

¹⁵⁵ Cyril’s twelve anathemas attached to his third letter to Nestorius became a stumbling block for any true communication between him and the Antiochene party. See Cyril’s works *Apologia xii Capitulum contra Orientales*, PG 76, 316-385 --against Andrew of Samosata’s refutation of the anathemas--, *Apologia xii Anathematismorum contra Theodoretum*, PG 76, 385-452 --facing Theodoret’s refutation-- and *Explanatio xii Capitulum*, PG 76, 293-312. It was only after the Formulary of Reunion (A.D. 433) –drafted by Theodoret of Cyrrhus– that the significance of Cyril’s anathemas was put a-side. See Fr. Young, ‘The Twelve Anathemas’, in *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (London: SCM, 1983), 220-229. Grillmeier, *Christ*, 491.

¹⁵⁶ In ACO 1.1.6/47: “ὁ δὲ δισχυριζόμενος μὴ δεῖν αὐτὸν ἄνθρωπον νοεῖσθαι ψιλόν, ἀλλὰ θεὸν καὶ ἄνθρωπον, ἀπονέμει μὲν τὸν ἀκάνθινον στέφανον καὶ τὰ ἕτερα τῶν παθῶν ἰδικῶς ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ ἀνὰ μέρος, προσκυβεῖν δὲ ὁμολογεῖ σὺν τῇ θεότητι τοῦτον” (he claims this that it is not possible to think of him as mere man, but God and man, and he attributed the thorny glow and the rest of the passions exclusively to man, in one part, and he confesses to worship him together with the Godhead).

¹⁵⁷ Meyendorff observed that Nestorianism was inevitable due to the obscure Christological suggestions in the Nicene Creed. According to Grillmeier, Nestorius depended on the Nicene faith when he introduced Christ as the active/suffering subject. In employing the term, he did not provide an ontological understanding of the word as long as the term was felt to maintain the unity of the two natures. J. Meyendorff, *Christ in the Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington D. C: Corpus, 1969), 3-16.

¹⁵⁸ Cyril, *Nest.* PG 76, 96Dff.

¹⁵⁹ Cyril, *Ad Reginas*, 1.1.5/34

Cyril, it was always the Logos incarnate that was hanging on the cross. Any reference to abandonment as separation could lead to the Arian diminishing of his divine state.¹⁶⁰ The loud cry was a supplication while the Logos was about to face death at a human level in his incarnational state.¹⁶¹ Thus, he faced the fear that was natural to the soul when death was *ante portas*.¹⁶² Cyril depended on the Origenist tradition by showing the paradigmatic and also salvific character of the loud cry. Christ prayed in the name of fallen humankind.¹⁶³ In doing so, Christ provided an example for the faithful.¹⁶⁴

According to Jouassard, Cyril employed Origenist typology for a difficult matter. For Jouassard, his “typological” understanding diminished the involvement of the Logos in human sufferings. Christ’s actions were in pretence.¹⁶⁵

Patristic literature sought to avoid the problems of either separating the Logos from the Father, or the Godhead from the manhood. As it was mentioned, Gregory had already shown the importance of maintaining the Logos as the element of unity in Christ in order to explain the resurrection, and also the incorruptibility of Christ’s body. Had Cyril argued thus, he would have been accused of identifying the Logos only with the soul. That would bring him one step closer to Apollinarianism for his opponents.

Basil had introduced the motif of the loud cry as a faithful prayer. John Chrysostom fully exploited this position. Cyril returned to this line of reasoning. For Cyril, the loud cry was not in despair. It expressed the reality of the passion: Christ’s soul was shrinking back before death. What triggered the faithful prayer on the cross was the prospect of approaching death.¹⁶⁶ For Cyril, Christ experienced fear at an economical level. Already, Didymos had developed an ethical understanding of fear as a natural passion that it was not immediately associated with sin. For Cyril, the divinity permitted the humanity to experience her natural shrinking back before

¹⁶⁰ Cyril, *Chr.* PG 75, 1328B and also in ACO 1.1.4/14.

¹⁶¹ Cyril used the linguistic forms: “εὐχόμενος” in ACO 1.1.4/14; “ἐκδυσωπούντος” in 1.1.5/35; “καλοῦντος” in 1.1.5/35; “ἐκ παρήσιας ἀναβοῶν” in Cyril, *Chr.* PG 75, 1325C.

¹⁶² Cyril, *Theos.* 24 [PG 75, 389].

¹⁶³ Cyril, *Ad Reginas*, 1.1.5/34.

¹⁶⁴ Cyril, *Chr.* PG 75, 1321C. Idem, *ComLk.* PG 72, 921C. Idem, *ComJn.* PG 74, 92C.

¹⁶⁵ Jouassard, ‘L’ Abandon’, 609ff and 617.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Athanasius, *Fragmenta Varia*, PG 26, 1241C: “φέρει δὲ καὶ τὴν ταραχὴν τῆς σαρκὸς ἐπὶ τῷ θανάτῳ προσιόντι” (he carries the trembling of the flesh when accepting death).

death. Cyril's presupposition was soteriological: Christ assumed fear to heal it.¹⁶⁷ Cyril fully appropriated the Gregorian notion of a transformation from within Christ's humanity:¹⁶⁸ Christ's humanity maintained its distinct character (weakness-limitations). But it was also transformed due to its union with the divine Logos (deification):¹⁶⁹

Had he not shrunk back, (human) nature would have not be freed from shrinking back; if he was not sorrowful, it would never have been spared from sorrow; had he not been distressed, (human nature) would never have been delivered from these. And you can apply this reasoning to any of the human conditions, for you will find that, in Christ, the passions were moved not to take control of him, as is the case for us, but having been moved, they were subdued by the power of the Logos dwelling in the flesh.¹⁷⁰

In the incarnation, the Logos assumed human limitations that he called his own.¹⁷¹ Whatever belonged to his humanity, it belonged to the Logos according to his *kenosis* –a term that Cyril understood in its Origenist meaning of voluntary poverty.¹⁷² *Kenosis* meant that the Logos subjected himself to the natural limitations of his humanity voluntarily in order to affirm the authenticity of the latter and restore it.¹⁷³ His loud cry was another expression of this assumption of human limitations in *kenosis*.¹⁷⁴ The notion of voluntary poverty continued to veil the mystery of the incarnation.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, in his *Thesaurus*, Cyril discussed Mt 27:46 alongside the

¹⁶⁷ Cyril, *ComJn*. PG 94, 88D. Cyril refuted Appollinarianism by indicating that such shrinking back before death belonged to the rational soul. In fact, Cyril related this shrinking back to thoughts. Cyril appropriated an Evagriian distinction between motions related to the irrational and the rational parts of the soul. The irrational is disturbed by evil passions. The rational is affected by thoughts commencing from memory and anticipations. For instance, Evagrius had related anger to memory and unfulfilled anticipations. See Evagrius, *Pract.* 4 and also 10.

¹⁶⁸ Nazianzene, *Epistula ci ad Cledonium*. PG 37,181C: “Τὸ γὰρ ἀπρόσληπτον, ἀθεράπευτον” (That which is not assumed is not healed). Cf. Athanasius, *Fragmenta Varia*, PG 26, 1240A: “εἰ γὰρ μὴ αὐτὸς ὡμοίωτο πρὸς ἀνθρώπους, οὐκ ἠδύναντο οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὁμοιοῦσθαι πρὸς Θεόν” (if was not after the likeness of men, men would not be able to be after the likeness of God). Cyril, *ComJn*. PG 74, 89D. Cyril reproduced *verbatim* the Gregorian motto: “ὃ γὰρ μὴ προσεῖληπται, οὐδὲ σέσωσται” (what was not assumed was not saved). Cf. Nazianzene, *Carmina Dogmatica*, 11,35 [PG 37, 468A].

¹⁶⁹ Cyril, *ComLk*, PG 72, 921C and 924B-C.

¹⁷⁰ Cyril, *Thes.* 24 [PG 75, 397C]. Cf. Athanasius, *In illud: Nunc Anima mea turbata est*, PG 26, 1241D.

¹⁷¹ In ACO 1.1.4/14.

¹⁷² In ACO 1.1.5/35ff. Cyril, *Chr.* PG 75, 1328D. Idem, *Thes.* 24 [PG 75, 397].

¹⁷³ Cyril, *Thes.* 24 and also ACO 1.1.6/121.

¹⁷⁴ Idem, *ComLk*. PG 72, 920D: “Ὅ γὰρ ἔδει τὸν καθιγμένον εἰς κένωσιν, καὶ τοῖς τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος ἐμβεβηκότα μέτροις, παραιτεῖσθαι δοκεῖν τὰ ἀνθρώπινα” (it was not proper to think that he who descended to *kenosis* and entered the limits of humanity quit the human conditions).

¹⁷⁵ Unlike modern thought, Cyril had little to say about *kenosis*. The term was coined to express the mystery of the incarnation as utterly inexpressible. Modern thought has moved in the opposite direction: *kenotic* theology became the basic tool of thought to exemplify the incarnation. It has been felt that the Logos' self-poverty revealed something about the character of the divine nature: the Godhead is capable of poverty and alienation from its own nature *qua* the divinity. Hence, the

prayer in Gethsemane. In doing so, Cyril illustrated the interaction between affirming Christ's real humanity, and the restoration of humankind. The assumption of human limitations was not a passive condition but a rather dynamic motion of the Logos who made human weakness his own.¹⁷⁶ Cyril inquired about the purpose of the incarnation if the Logos did not assume true humanity alongside all its natural limitations.¹⁷⁷ That Christ shrank back before death was a result of natural accordance: naturally, the soul desires life over death.¹⁷⁸ On the cross, as in Gethsemane, the miraculous natural phenomena, and also the fact that Christ committed his spirit to his Father, manifested that he was not a mere man; he was always the Logos incarnate that preserved human weakness in order to overcome it.

h. Theodoret of Cyrillus: the sober exegete.

Unlike most of the authors discussed so far, Theodoret presented a genuine interest in the loud cry. This interest was manifested in his exegetical works.¹⁷⁹ Like

generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit –defined in terms of the *kenosis* of the Father-- is the “estrangement” of the Father from the other two divine persons. This *kenosis* is eternal and also resulted in the creation of the world and the incarnation. It is true that patristic thought introduced the notion of *otherness* in God, but this was only in terms of the incarnation. The application of this notion of *otherness* in the life of the Trinity has only limited the awe before the mystery of the incarnation. If the divine nature is *kenotic*, then the incarnation was only part of what it is a “natural” process within the Godhead. For instance, in the episode on the cross, Bulgakov saw the estrangement of the Logos from the Spirit. This estrangement was founded in the notion of the eternal generation and procession --respectively-- in the Trinity. Balthasar followed the same notion of *kenosis* which he, too, related to divine estrangement. However, he was more cautious than Bulgakov to keep an apophatic attitude to this *kenosis*. Balthasar did not intend to exemplify the ‘Hegelian’ relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity, but to show the continuity between Christ's limitations and our limitations. See S. Bulgakov, *Du Verbe Incarné*. Idem, *The Comforter*. N. Gorodetzky, ‘Doctrinal Writings on the Kenosis’, in *The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought* (London: SPCK, 1938), 127-174. P. Gavriilyuk, ‘The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov’, *SJT* 58, no.3 (2005), 251-269. N. Sakharov, ‘S. Bulgakov on kenosis’, in *The Theology of Archimandrite Sophrony*, 119-126. Evans, ‘The Self-Emptying of God’, 246-272. Richard, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God*. Balthasar provided a constructive criticism of German kenoticism and Bulgakov's theology. See Balthasar, *Theodrama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. IV, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco CA: Ignatius, 1994), 319. Idem, *Mysterium*, 32. A. Baker, ‘The Kenosis Problem in von Balthasar's Reading of Bulgakov’, URL: <http://www.geocities.com/sbulgakovsociety/ABaker-BulgakovBalthasar.doc> (last accessed 05/03/08). A. Scola, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar: A Theological Style*, trans. J.T and A.C.T., Retrieval & Renewal (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995). G. F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). B. Blankenhorn, ‘Balthasar's Method of Divine Naming’, *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 1 no. 2 (2003), 245-268. P. Casarella, ‘The Descent, Divine Self-Enrichment, and the Universality of Salvation’, URL: <http://communio-icr.com/articles/PDF/PCasarella.pdf> (last accessed 05/03/08).

¹⁷⁶ McGuckin, *Saint Cyril*, 183cf..

¹⁷⁷ In ACO 1.1.1/39 and also 1.1.5/19.

¹⁷⁸ Cyril, *Thes.* 24 [PG 75, 397].

¹⁷⁹ In a polemical context, Theodore reserved his comments on the loud cry only when refuting Cyril's

Cyril —though independently—, Theodoret realised the dead end that the motif of abandonment as separation had led Christology. Thus, he turned to the notion of Mt 27:46 as a faithful prayer. Already, Basil, John Chrysostom and Cyril had followed this exegetical stand. For Theodoret, Mt 27:46 was Christ’s prayer in his humanity (ἀνθρωπίνως). The loud cry manifested the “reason of the economy” (ὁ λόγος τῆς οἰκονομίας). Christ prayed by addressing the Father who actually listened to his cry: the prayer illustrated the union between the Father and Son.¹⁸⁰ What Theodoret meant by the “reason of the economy” was the fact that, though Christ was always aware of his union with the Father, he prayed to illustrate this union. Thus, it was a prayer in union, not separation. Arguing thus, Theodoret met the Arian scepticism about the unity between the Logos and the Father.¹⁸¹

The fact that Theodoret addressed the active subject as ‘Christ’ could be an indication that his Christological allegiance was with the Antiocheans. According to Grillmeier, Nestorius had favoured the term “Christ” over “Logos” without strictly identifying it with the Logos. He understood it as the end-result of the union between God and man. Theodoret did not use the term in this sense. The anti-Arian context in which he employed the term, and the fact that he did not follow the Athanasian distinction between groups of actions was an indication of Theodoret’s willingness to maintain a single active subject.

He says that he is abandoned, without any sins being committed by him, but death holds onto him, since he has been given power over the sinful. So he calls abandonment not the separation from the united divinity, as some have claimed, but the occurring assent to the passion.¹⁸²

Theodoret dismissed the notion of separation. The indication concerning the claims of “some” individuals could point to several theological groups: Arians, Apollinarians, Nicenes —due to their obscure Christology— and even Nestorians. Cyril did not hold such a position (i.e. separation). For Theodoret, abandonment defined

twelve anathemas. Cf. Cyril, *Apologia contra Theodoretum*, PG 76, 409B.

¹⁸⁰ Theodoret, *ComIs.* 15.347 [reference in Möhle (ed.), *Theodoret von Kyros: Kommentar zu Jesaja*].

¹⁸¹ *Idem, ibid.* 15.360: “Καὶ οὐ σμικρύνει τὰὐτὰ τοῦ μονογενοῦς τὴν θεότητα: δῆλος γὰρ τῆς οἰκονομίας ὁ λόγος” (and these do not diminish the divinity of the Only-begotten, for the reason of the economy is manifest).

¹⁸² Theodoret, *Psal.* PG 80, 1009: “□Εγκαταλελειφθαι δὲ λέγει, ὡς ἀμαρτίας μὲν οὐδεμιᾶς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ γενομένης, τοῦ δὲ θανάτου κεκρατηκότος, ὃς κατὰ τῶν ἡμαρτηκότων τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐδέδεκτο. Ἐγκατάλειψιν τοίνυν καλεῖ, οὐ τὸν τῆς ἠνωμένης θεότητος χωρισμόν, ὡς τινες ὑπειλήφασιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν γεγενημένην τοῦ πάθους συγχώρησιν”.

divine “consent” (συγχώρησιν). The divinity assents so that Christ was subject to death: “The divinity was present even when the form of the servant suffered, and it allowed it to suffer”.¹⁸³ For Rossé,

the sense that Theodoret gives to the abandonment of Christ comes close to the sense that philological analysis attributes to the verb itself (in Hebrew and in Greek), a sense that P. Foresi summarizes in these terms: ‘to leave someone entirely in a precarious situation’. The Father abstains from intervening in a situation of suffering provoked by men.¹⁸⁴

In his *Explanatio in Canticum*, Theodoret had addressed the soul’s abandonment in terms of divine assent to trials. In his Christology, Theodoret followed the same line of reasoning. Cyril had touched upon this theme, but only briefly. The notion of divine assent provided a coherent background for Theodoret’s Christology and anthropology. Thus, Theodoret implied the continuity between Christ’s humanity and the human race. It is not clear what Theodoret’s source was. Already, the Macarian *Spiritual Homilies* and also the “Evagrian” *Lausiac History* had illustrated the link between divine assent and distressful conditions. Despite the fact that Origen had already made such a comment, it was not until Evagrius and Macarius that the notion of abandonment was firmly established in terms of divine assent to trials.

Thus, it is in Theodoret that we could discern the beginning of a link between Christ’s suffering and the experience of abandonment by the devotee. What was common between Christ’s humanity and humankind was not an experience of separation from God; but the fact of divine assent to trials. In both cases (exegesis and Christology), Theodoret excluded the notion of sin. Theodoret returned to the Origenist notion of ethical trials as testing –well spotted by Layton–. Christ experienced trials (i.e. passion/death) to show his faith, on the same way that humanity had been tried. Already Gregory of Nazianzus had argued the importance of human obedience in terms of Christ’s obedience to the Father. The notion of assent shows the continuity between Christ and humankind.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Idem, *Psal.* PG 80,1009:“Παρήν γάρ ἡ θεότης καὶ πασχούση τῇ τοῦ δούλου μορφῇ, καὶ συνεχώρησε παθεῖν”.

¹⁸⁴ Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 77.

¹⁸⁵ Nazianzene, *Fil.* 5-6 [PG 36, 108-112]. Cf. Didymos, *Trin.* PG 39, 913-916.

i. John Damascene: defining the tradition.

Exegetes of the era of late antiquity who discussed the abandonment of Christ on the cross came to an end with John Damascene. His own exegesis extended from his theological epitome *Expositio Fidei*,¹⁸⁶ to his polemical work *De duabus voluntatibus*,¹⁸⁷ *Contra Nestorianos*,¹⁸⁸ and his *In Epistulas Pauli*.¹⁸⁹ However, his interest in the loud cry was only momentary. The years from Chalcedon (A.D. 451) to 2nd Constantinople (A.D. 680-681) directed theological attention to the manner in which the union between the human and divine was achieved. After Chalcedon, the politics of pursuing an ecclesiastical union under the imperial auspices focused on issues that affirmed the union between the human and divine. Maximus the Confessor –an important source for John– had defended the presence of natural human capacities in Christ. Maximus’ greatest contribution was the fact that –while revisiting the earlier Athanasian distinction between actions attributed to the divinity and the humanity– he concluded that the scriptural accounts demonstrated the presence of the humanity *qua* humanity, and the humanity *qua* deified humanity in Christ. Thus, Maximus avoided the sharp Athanasian distinction by indicating the need to manifest the fact that the humanity of Christ remained within its ontological constitution and maintained its natural accordance: it kept its distinct ontological character, and also it was enriched and transformed.

According to Louth’s exposition of the Damascene’s thought, John found himself in a totally different political and theological ambience from the other authors so far treated. John developed his thought under the Muslim caliphate, defending –or better defining– the orthodox faith against other religions (e.g. Islam) and Christian heresies that the imperial authority had had the power to suppress in Byzantium. Thus, John’s writings corresponded to different needs in theology that rose together with the iconoclast controversy (c. 730), the shrinking of the Byzantine territory in East and West, and the expansion of the Arab world. However, despite his political subjection to the Caliph, John’s theological allegiance lay within Byzantium.

¹⁸⁶ Damascene, *ExpF.* 68 [all references in PTS 12].

¹⁸⁷ Idem, *Volunt.* 28.57ff [all references in PTS 22].

¹⁸⁸ Idem, *Nest.* 26.1 [references in PTS 22].

¹⁸⁹ Idem, *Commentarii in Epistulas Pauli*, PG 95, 824.

John treated Mt 27:46 as a prayer. He discussed it under the title “On the Prayer of the Lord” in his *Expositio Fidei*,¹⁹⁰ blending together his sources. It is clear –pace Louth– that John employed an Evagrian definition of prayer as the ascent of the intellect to the divine.¹⁹¹ By using this definition, John illustrated the unity between the human *nous* and the Logos (anti-Apollinarianism).¹⁹² He also introduced several examples of such prayers in Christ’s life.¹⁹³ His last example concerned Mt 27:46. Having identified the loud cry as prayer, John followed the established anti-Arian argument concerning the unity between Father and Son. He also extended such unity to the relationship between divinity and humanity in Christ.

Neither is the Father his God, only if we divide what is seen from what is meant by the subtle imaginings of the *nous*, as it is so in our case, nor was he abandoned by his own divinity. But we were abandoned and forsaken. So he prayed thus accommodating our person.¹⁹⁴

Joussard raised scepticism with regard to the above extract. It is not surprising, since Joussard understood *accommodation* as a ‘typological’ device. For John, Christ accommodated abandonment only in a ‘relative’ way.¹⁹⁵ The presence of “ὑποδύεται” (to play role/pretend) could justify Joussard’s argument. However, John used it by means of ‘putting on’.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Damascene, *ExpF.* 68 [pg 167-168]: “Περὶ τῆς τοῦ κυρίου προσευχῆς”.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Evagrius, *Orat.* 35: “Προσευχὴ ἐστὶν ἀνάβασις νοῦ πρὸς Θεόν”. Louth, *Damascene*, 176.

¹⁹² Damascene, *ExpF.* 68 [pg 167]: “ὁ ἅγιος αὐτοῦ νοῦς ἅπαξ καθ’ ὑπόστασιν τῷ θεῷ λόγῳ ἡνωμένος” (his holy nous was once [and for all] united with the Logos the God hypostatically).

¹⁹³ Cf. Jn 11:41 and Mt 26:39.

¹⁹⁴ Damascene, *ExpF.* 68: “οὔτε γὰρ θεὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ πατήρ, εἰ μὴ γε διαιρεθέντος ἰσχυαῖς τοῦ νοῦ φαντασίαις τοῦ ὄραμένου ἐκ τοῦ νοουμένου, τάσσοιτο μεθ’ ἡμῶν, οὔτε κατελείφθη ὑπὸ τῆς οἰκειᾶς θεότητος, ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς ἡμεῖν οἱ ἐγκαταλελειμμένοι καὶ παρεωραμένοι. Ὡστε τὸ ἡμέτερον οἰκειούμενος πρόσωπον ταῦτα προσήξατο”. I have consulted Schaff’s translation in the *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series [vol. 9, 802].

¹⁹⁵ Damascene, *ExpF.* 69: “Χρῆ εἰδέναι, ὡς δύο οἰκειώσεις: μία φυσικὴ καὶ οὐσιώδης, καὶ μία προσωπικὴ καὶ σχετικὴ. Φυσικὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οὐσιώδης, καθ’ ἣν διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν ὁ κύριος τὴν τε φύσιν ἡμῶν καὶ τὰ φυσικὰ πάντα ἀνέλαβε φύσει καὶ ἀληθείᾳ γενόμενος ἄνθρωπος καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν ἐν πείρᾳ γενόμενος: προσωπικὴ δέ, ὅτε τις τὸ ἑτέρου ὑποδύεται πρόσωπον διὰ σχέσιν, οἰκτόν φημι ἢ ἀγάπην, καὶ ἀντ’ αὐτοῦ τοὺς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ ποιεῖται λόγους μηδὲν αὐτῷ προσήκοντας, καθ’ ἣν τὴν τε κατάραν καὶ τὴν ἐγκατάλειψιν ἡμῶν καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ ὄντα φυσικὰ οὐκ αὐτὸς ταῦτα ὦν ἢ γενόμενος ὡκειώσατο, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἡμέτερον ἀναδεχόμενος πρόσωπον καὶ μεθ’ ἡμῶν τασσόμενος” (we need to know that there are two accommodations: one natural and essential, and one prosopic and relative. Natural and essential according to which through his love for mankind the lord assumed our nature and all that is natural becoming in nature and reality man and experiencing what is natural. It is prosopic, when he puts on him the person of the other in relationship, I mean pity and love; and for it (i.e. the person), he makes the words (his own) though they are not proper for him, through which (he assumed) the curse and our abandonment and all these that are not natural he did not accommodate them being himself or becoming like that, but receiving our person and taking our part).

¹⁹⁶ Both meanings (i.e. ‘to put on’ and ‘to pretend’) originated from the classical tragedies where the actors were putting on them their vestement and mask to assume another ‘personality’. Thus, they pretended to be another person. In the modern Greek use, the verb only signifies a pretentious action.

Before John, Maximus had distinguished between *natural* (φυσική) and *relative* (σχετική)¹⁹⁷ *accommodation* (οικειώσεις).¹⁹⁸ The first defined natural properties that constitute humanity and were essential to its being; such as hunger and thirst.¹⁹⁹ For Maximus, such passions resulted from the fall. However, they were an essential part of human existence after the fall. They were the results of the fall “according to punishment” (λόγοι επιπμίας). The relative *accommodation* includes what humanity

¹⁹⁷ For Coakley, the relative *accommodation* of human weakness did not detach Christ from his experience. It highlighted the paradox that the divine Logos experienced weakness. S. Coakley, ‘What does Chalcedon Solve and what does it not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian Definition’, 143-163.

¹⁹⁸ The term *accommodation* or *oikeiosis* (οικειώσεις) was of Stoic origin. Clement was the first to appropriate the term for Christian ethics. For Clement, it defined the assimilation of human nature to passions due to ethical corruption, or the ascent of the soul from passions to *apatheia*. Thus, it defined either estrangement or return to one’s own nature. Clement, *Paedagogus*, 2.10.110. Idem, *Stromata*, 4.23.148. However, it was also an alternative term for the “likeness” to God –apparently borrowing from the classical meaning of *oikeiosis* in terms of friendship and familiarity--. Clement, *Stromata*, 5.4.23. In its Stoic sense, the term had addressed self-awareness of the individual with regard to what constituted its nature (i.e. being). For the Stoics, accommodation of one’s nature was more of a cognitive process through which the individual was becoming self-aware of its being. This notion entailed the concept of taking actions that were proper to one’s being. The individual evaluates things that stand outside it and takes proper actions for or against them. Thus, the self was the principle of evaluating matters. The notion of *oikeiosis*, in the sense that it developed self-awareness, was also related to self-preservation. As the individual is developing self-awareness of its being it deliberates on things profitable for its own nature and things unprofitable. Thus, for the Stoics, choice was an existential function of the self. Discussing a passage in Cicero, *De Finibus* 3, 20-23, Engberg-Pedersen noted that the notion of *oikeiosis* was not a teleological one where nature had set objectives that the self needed to follow. It was the self that perceived its own objectives *qua* nature. T. Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis: Moral Development and Social Interaction in Early Stoic Philosophy*, Studies in Hellenistic Civilization II (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990). R. W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1999). Athanasius was the first to incorporate this motif into his Christology taking its meaning at face value: the Logos has made space (οικέω-ώ) for the human element in him. Athanasius, *Fragmenta Varia*, PG 26, 1245A and 1325A. Didymos, however, was the first to relate *oikeiosis* to *kenosis* in the light of human natural passions (blameless passions/ἀδιάβλητα πάθη) highlighting the notion of “making way” for that condition which Christ was not *qua* God. Didymos, *FrPs.* 716 [Ps 68:17-19]. Cf. Cyril, *Epistulae Pascuales*, PG 77, 868,53. An important element of the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* was expressed by Cicero when discussing self-awareness. For Cicero, nature embedded animated species with self-awareness that lead them to their conceiving what self-preservation meant for their being: it is within human nature to avoid whatever might bring destruction to its being. Maximus fully exploited this notion in his attempt to show that human nature desires life rather than death as a natural capacity embedded into humanity by God. See Maximus, *Opusc.* 1, [PG 91, 12C]; 3, [PG 91, 48A]; 7, [PG 91, 77C]. Maximus, *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG 91, 297A. Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ*, 123-124. Beyond any doubt, Maximus was working on the patristic origins of the term as opposed to a direct reading from the Stoics. Cf. John Chrysostom, *In illud Pater si possibile est transeat*, PG 51,38. Theophilus of Alexandria, *Sermo in fluxu sanguinis laborantem*, in ACO² 1.288.

¹⁹⁹ Maximus, *Opusc.* 19, PG 91, 221B: “τὰ ὅσαπερ φυσικά τυγχάνει μετὰ τῆς φύσεως” (whatever it is natural according to the nature).

has put on due to the fall, though these were not an essential part of its being.²⁰⁰ i.e. the results of sin “according to dishonour” (λόγοι ἀτιμίας).²⁰¹ However, after the fall, they became part of humanity. The motif of abandonment belonged to the latter group. Maximus intended to show the way that Christ accommodated the *results of the fall* and also the *results of sin* without endangering his ethical purity.²⁰² As it was observed, Didymos designated the latter as ‘λόγοι παραπτώματων’. It cannot be accidental that Maximus deliberately employed the multifaceted motif of ‘λόγοι’ in this sense to address the results of sin in order to dissociate the cause from the results (sin-passions).²⁰³

John appropriated this Maximian distinction by introducing the difference between “essential” (οὐσιώδης) and “prosopic” (προσωπική) accommodation.²⁰⁴ For Maximus, the former accommodation included properties that constitute humanity *qua* humanity without which the latter would have been a docetic appearance. The reason that John substituted Maximus’ *relative* accommodation for the *prosopic* is because it expressed better Maximus’ spirit: Logos accommodated the *results of sin* in his economical *kenosis*.²⁰⁵ Hence, John emphasised the hypostatic union between

²⁰⁰ Maximus, *Opusc. op. cit.*: “οὐδ’ αὐτοῦ κυρίως ἐστίν, ὃ μήτε ἡμῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὡς συστατικόν, εἰ καὶ ἡμῶν εἶναι λέγεται διὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν παράβασιν, οἷον ἡ ἀγνοία, ἡ ἐγκατάλειψις, ἡ παρακοή, τὸ ἀνυπότακτον” (it is not his mainly, what it is not for us constitutive [i.e. fundamental] of nature, even though it is said to be ours for the ancient transgression, such as ignorance, the abandonment, the disobedience and the insubordination).

²⁰¹ Maximus, *Opusc.* 20, PG 91, 237A.

²⁰² Maximus distinguished between ignorance, which was not part of human nature even though it had appeared to humanity after the fall, and the capacity of desire which, according to Maximus, was an essential property of humanity. Maximus, *Opusc.* 19, PG 91, 217-224. The distinction between what was natural in order to be human and what was only accommodated for soteriological reasons was the mean line of reasoning for the Maximian party in order to secure the presence of human natural capacities in Christ against the monothelite diminutions. See Bathrellos, *Byzantine Christ*. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 1999). M. Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Early Christian Studies (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

²⁰³ In his ascetical writings, Maximus had distinguished between the passions that worked from within human nature and the passions that had had an external cause (i.e. sin). Christ accommodated the first and only the results of the second without ever being subjected to this external cause (i.e. sin). Cf. Maximus, *Thal.* 51 [PG 90, 484]. Maximus, *LibAs*, 35 [PG 90, 940-941]. Maximus was working on the Gregorian motto that Christ restored whatever he had assumed.

²⁰⁴ I have deliberately avoided translating the *προσωπική* as “personal” in order to avoid a modern personalistic reading of the term. For John, the term highlighted the reality of the incarnation, presenting the incarnation as the economy of the Logos.

²⁰⁵ Maximus, *Opusc.* 9, PG 91, 120A: “οὐκ ἐκτισις ἦν, ὡς ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, ἀλλὰ κένωσις ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τοῦ σαρκωθέντος Λόγου τὸ πάθος” (the passion was not a punishment, as it is for us, but it was the kenosis of the Logos for our sake).

the Logos and his humanity (*prosopic*). For John, the humanity was ‘humanity’ to the degree that it maintained its natural properties within the hypostatic union. Some features, such as abandonment, were accommodated within the salvific scope of the incarnation.

John turned to the Origenist notion of the paradigmatic nature of Christ’s passion. It was not “cowardice” (μικροψυχία) that caused Christ’s despair as he was crushed under the weight of the appointed task.²⁰⁶ Through the loud cry, the Son manifested his obedience to the Father by providing an example to the human race: “He suffered in our nature to strengthen it against the passions and teach us to look at God during temptations and call upon him for assistance”.²⁰⁷ Christ assumed human weakness and showed the way to strengthen humanity against such weakness. For John, the assumption of human weakness was understood in terms of the restoration of the human race. But such restoration was not superficial: Christ defeated natural limitations in his flesh. Rather than indicating Christ at the level of an exemplar, John emphasised the active character that restoration means for the devotee. What Christ taught was not to merely imitate him by praying, but “look at God... and call upon him for assistance”. This was John’s exhortation to action.

²⁰⁶ Damascene, *Nest.* 26.1 [pg 272]. Cf. Maximus, *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG 91, 297D.

²⁰⁷ Damascene, *Nest. op. cit.*: “ὀπέμεινε τῇ ἡμετέρῃ φύσει, ἵνα νευρώσῃ ταύτην κατὰ τῶν παθῶν καὶ διδάξῃ ἡμᾶς ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς πρὸς θεὸν βλέπειν καὶ αὐτὸν πρὸς ἐπικουρίαν καλεῖν”.

PART 3

1. Origenist ascetical themes

Origen was not a “mystic” in the modern meaning of the term.¹ Despite the fact that he had introduced the foundations for a Christian mysticism, in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen did not address the direct mystical and ecstatic enrapture of the soul at a cognitive or supra-cognitive level.² Origen remained an exegete who emphasised the presence of the Logos in the Christian scriptures and the sacramental life of the Church.

Here, we will expand our research to include Origen’s more ethically-oriented works, such as *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* and *De Oratione*, his exegetical masterpieces *Commentarii in Evangelium Ioannis* and *Homiliae in Numeros*, and also his notorious *De Principiis*.

It was observed that, in the *Song of Songs*, Origen did not safeguard the soul from trials. But Origen did not overlook the presence of trials in the soul’s spiritual journey. In fact, he presented ethical trials as a spiritual norm. In his *Exhortatio* and *De Oratione*, Origen provided scriptural witnesses (i.e. Job 7:1, Is 28:10 and Ro 5:3-5) for such trials,³ identifying trials with this present life: “[T]hat the whole of human life upon earth is a time of temptations we learn from Job in the following words: Is not the life of men upon earth a time of temptations?”⁴ For Origen, temptations were the warfare of the soul with passions and desires. In a lengthy passage that is worth citing Origen wrote:

For whether the wrestling is against the flesh that lusts and wars against the spirit⁵ or against the life of all flesh⁶ (which is synonymous with the body which the intelligence, otherwise called the heart, inhabits) and such is the wrestling of those

¹ For a fresh look to the difficulty to describe any Patristic author as “mystic” in the light of the modern approach to religious mysticism, see the ‘Afterword’ in the second edition of A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: OUP, 2nd ed., 2007), 200-214.

² The only work that Origen provided *On Prayer* interpreted the dominical prayer. Cf. Mt 6:9-13. It was the work of Evagrius of Pontus *De Oratione* that commenced the Christian shifting from biblical exegesis (i.e. dominical prayer) to a more independent discourse that discussed prayer within the context of human purification, ethical warfare and passions. For instance, compare the content of Origen, *De Oratione*, P. Koetschau (ed.), GCS 3 (1899), 297-403; Gregory of Nyssa, *De Oratione Dominica*, GNO 7.2 (1992), 5-74; Maximus, *Expositio Orationis Dominicae*, PG 90, 872-909 to that of Evagrius, *De Oratione*, PG 79, 1165-1200.

³ Origen, *Martyr*. 1 [all references indicate chapter divisions in the edition of Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, R. A. Greer (ed.), Classics of Western Spirituality (London: SPCK, 1979)].

⁴ Origen, *Orat.* 29.2 [translations by Greer unless otherwise stated]. Cf. Jn 7:1.

⁵ Eph 6:12. Ga 5:17.

⁶ Lv 17:11.

who are tempted with temptations which are “common to man”; or whether, as with athletes who have made progress and are more perfect, no longer wrestling against flesh and blood or tested by temptations that are common to man, which they have now trodden under foot, our struggling is against principalities, and against the powers, and against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness,⁷ in either case we are not released from temptation.⁸

The presence of temptations was applied to both the immature and also more perfect members of the Church. Origen illustrated the various forms that trials could acquire: fleshly passions, and also warfare against the demonic powers. Origen took Mt 7:14 at face value highlighting the “hard path” of Christian life.⁹ Yet, for Origen, the “hard path” was understood in connection to the “body of death”, i.e. sin.¹⁰ According to him, it was sin that made this life a “hard path”. This hardness was a predicate for the path, not a “natural” quality. Origen emphasised that, in the Gospel, the path was designated as “τεθλιμμένη”, not “θλιβουσα”.¹¹ What Origen argued was the fact that it was sin that made the path to be hard; the path --as such-- was not hard. In doing so, Origen highlighted the presence of sin as a spiritual factor.¹² Spiritual growth was *hard* only for this soul that had not put off sinfulness. In emphasising the ethical importance of sin, Origen was rejecting the Gnostic notion of an evil or inadequate Creator. For Origen, it was sin that caused evils.

In his *De Oratione*, Origen introduced the presence of demons which he linked to the presence of temptations. The Alexandrian author had not maintained a unified theory concerning demons and their ethical role: in his *De Principiis*, he denied the fact that demons were responsible for the human passions. The latter resulted from the excessive and immoderate operation of the body.¹³ But, in his exegetical work *In Numeros*, Origen associated every individual sin with an appropriate demon.

⁷ Eph 6:12.

⁸ Origen, *Orat.* 29.2. [trans. Lay].

⁹ Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4.22.138: “ἡ δὲ διάθεσις καὶ φύσις ἔσται καὶ συνάσκησις. οὐ δεῖ δὲ ἀρθέντας μετατεθῆναι, ἀλλὰ βαδίζοντας ἀφικέσθαι οἱ δεῖ, διὰ πάσης τῆς στενῆς διελθόντας ὁδοῦ: τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ ἐλकुσθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ ἄξιον γενέσθαι τὴν δύναμιν τῆς χάριτος παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ λαβεῖν καὶ ἀκωλύτως ἀναδραμεῖν” (the disposition is nature and practise. There is no necessity for removing those who are raised on high, but there is necessity for those who are walking to reach the requisite goal, by passing over the whole of the narrow way. For this is to be drawn by the Father, to become worthy of receiving the power of grace from God, so as to run without hindrance) [trans. in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, pg. 895].

¹⁰ Origen, *In Jeremiam*, 20.7.20 [pg 280 in SC 238].

¹¹ Origen put Mt. 7:14 and 11:30 side by side: the *narrow gate* and *hard path*, and the *light yoke* of Christ. Though the path was hard indeed, it was light when compared to the sinful life. But also, the hard way was like a light yoke when the faithful was taking into consideration the prizes with which he would be rewarded. Origen, *Martyr.* 31-32. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 2.20.126.

¹² Origen, *Commentariis in Evangelium Joannis*, 6.19.105ff [pg 208 in SC 157].

¹³ Origen, *Princ.* 3.2.2ff.

According to this latter work, sin could not have been committed without the presence of the demons.¹⁴ Their presence introduced a sort of “darkness” that lurked within the soul.

Even in this case, and despite the undeniable fact that Origen set the foundations for the later development of a Christian demonology, in his own work, the presence of demons was primarily associated with idolatry in terms of ignorance. Demons were not ‘personified’ human passions. They were entities that desired to lead the soul to idolatry. Idolatry was the outcome of ignorance, i.e., the abandonment of divine knowledge. What caused God’s wrath in the biblical narratives was Israel’s ignorance concerning the Godhead. This ignorance led Israel to idolatry. At an ethical level, Origen maintained the role of demons as agents of deception that led the soul to ignorance (i.e. sin) and idolatry.¹⁵ In Origen, demonic presence was related to the presence of the pagan idols.¹⁶

The above observations shed more light on Origen’s concept of divine abandonment. In his work on the *Song of Songs*, Origen denied the presence of sin as a spiritual factor that had caused divine abandonment. Divine abandonment was understood in terms of divine pedagogy and providence. In his ethical works, Origen presented an argument based on the concept of cause and effect: though God had appointed a ministering angel to each individual, God withdrew his angel from the person that fell “backwards to more material things”.¹⁷ Consequently, the absence of the ministering angel led to the presence of the adversary power: “[The worse power] having found an opportunity to attack by reason of his indifference, will be at hand to prompt him to such and such sin, seeing that he has offered himself in readiness for sin”.¹⁸ The introduction of the “worse power” was a result of human sin. It is not clear what Origen meant by the “worse power”. There is no doubt that the “ministering angel” meant the divine closeness. It seems that Origen referred to the “worse power” to indicate the closeness of sin. According to Jay, Origen possibly alluded to L. 11:24-26. Thus, for Jay, the term signified the demonic presence. But, it is more likely that Origen merely established the notion of sin in more concrete terms, without necessarily introducing demonic presence. Jay remarked that, for

¹⁴ Origen, *27Nm.* 8 [to Greer (ed.), *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*].

¹⁵ Origen, *27Nm.* 8.

¹⁶ Origen, *27Nm.* 3.

¹⁷ Origen, *Orat.* 6.4.

¹⁸ Origen, *Orat. op. cit.*

Origen, sin lied within, whereas the demonic presence “incites and urges us, striving to extend sin over a larger field”.¹⁹

What we need to take into consideration is Origen’s distinction between divine presence and the presence of sin: divine proximity meant the soul’s spiritual rest, whereas divine absence signalled the presence of sin. Origen anticipated Macarius/Symeon’ position by indicating that there could be no mingling between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of sin in the soul:

[W]e must understand this about the kingdom of God, that, just as there is no fellowship between righteous and unrighteous, nor communion of light and darkness, nor concord of Christ with Belial,²⁰ so the kingdom of sin cannot co-exist with the kingdom of God. If, then, we wish God to reign in us, let not sin in any way reign in our mortal body.²¹

Origen established his thought in the Pauline vocabulary: Paul had ruled out the co-existence of grace and sin in the soul. However, Origen understood this co-existence in terms of faith and idolatry. Thus, it would be superfluous to apply to Origen the later ascetical reading concerning the distinction between grace and sin. Nevertheless, Origen set the foundations for this later development.

For Origen, unlike the bride of the *Song*, the soul was not secure at any stage of spiritual life. Origen referred to ethical backsliding which could affect even the most perfect.²²

Has anyone ever thought that men were outside the scope of temptations whose tale he knows, having himself completed it? And what occasion is there upon which a man is confident as not having to struggle that he may not commit sin?²³

The picture that Origen drew in this passage was quite different than the image of the “joyful” soul of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. In his biblical exegesis, Origen was stirring up spiritual desire for union with the divine: it was *eros* that was the main motif of this latter work. In his *De Oratione*, Origen addressed his patron Ambrose to instruct him in ethical labouring. Thus, he tried to elucidate the spiritual profits that Ambrose could reap from prayer and ethical efforts. The dominical prayer had set a model for prayer. The motif of temptations was an integral part of the dominical prayer. Thus, the two diverging images of the joyful soul and the ever-tempted devotee were employed within different theological frameworks. The two images were not meant to be juxtaposed: the ethical application of the Gospel to the

¹⁹ Cf. E. G. Jay (ed.), *Origen's Treatise on Prayer* (London: SPCK, 1954), 58-59.

²⁰ 2 Cor. 6:14-15.

²¹ Origen, *Orat.* 25.3 [trans. Jay].

²² Origen, *Martyr.* 18. Cf. Is 14:12.

²³ Origen, *Orat.* 29.5 [trans. Jay].

life of the devotee led the soul to ethical perfection. Overall, Origen pointed to ethical perfection without dismissing the fact that this fulfillment was only a promise that was yet to come.

Indeed, in his *In Numeros*, Origen alternated between the image of perfection and the ideal of spiritual warfare: rest and effort, joy and trials. For Origen, the above terms had a dialectical character. And also, the divine presence and absence was of a dialectical nature. Thus, Origen introduced the notion of ethical efforts and spiritual rest.²⁴ According to Origen, the book of *Exodus* was an allegory for the soul's ascension to the divine. Its context elucidated the various "stations" (σταθμοί)²⁵ that were reflections of the stages during the soul's spiritual journey.²⁶ Israel had travelled through resting places, but she also struggled to make her way across the desert.²⁷ Bringing this analogy to the ethical life of the soul, Origen presented the paradox that the soul was pursued by Pharaoh (i.e. sin) even though the Lord had delivered her (i.e. baptism).²⁸ In order to address this paradox, Origen introduced the theme of alternating periods of ethical efforts and spiritual rest. After the time of Israel's rescue from Pharaoh's armies, Origen discerned a pattern between resting and distressing periods for Israel. At an ethical level, the soul was meant to experience periods of spiritual rest and ethical trials. Behind this scheme, Origen indicated the work of divine providence. According to Origen, God drew the soul closer to him through an initial grace. Then, the soul was left to trials and temptations. This motif of interchanging periods of effort and rest could only be explained in the light of Origen's notion of divine pedagogy that tested the soul; for God was leaving the soul subject to trials and temptations to purify her from the sin that was still stirring within her.

Though Origen seems to have maintained two diverse ethical theories with regard to the role of sin in spiritual life, his main point remained unchanged. His ethical theory, as well as his exegesis, was informed by the eschatological orientation of the Christian faith. Origen introduced the Pauline language of the "promised

²⁴ Daniélou, *Origen*, 296.

²⁵ Origen reckoned 42 places in which Israel stopped at while wandering in the desert: the number was identical to the number of generations that followed from Abraham up to the incarnation. Cf. Nm 33:1ff. Mt 1:17.

²⁶ Origen, *27Nm*. 4.

²⁷ Origen introduced this notion based on i) the etymology of the Hebrew names of the various locations in the book of *Numbers*, and ii) the biblical events that took place.

²⁸ Origen, *27Nm. op. cit.*

heritage”, the “future hope”, and the future “rewards”.²⁹ The spiritual scheme of effort and rest was established on the notion of “time” as divine pedagogy. Trials and temptations were spiritual features of this life. Complete spiritual rest signified the soul’s introduction to the kingdom of God. The dialectics between rest and toil suggested that divine pedagogy was not related to sin. But it was linked to the notion that union with the divine was a promise yet to come.³⁰ Thus, the divine pedagogy was meant to instruct the soul to this eschatological orientation. For Cheek, Origen has been working on the neo-testamental complementarity between the kingdom of God and the promise to be completed. Indeed, redemption was realised through the passion of Christ. But “the plan (for perfect restoration) waits to be consummated in the future at the end of time”.³¹

Then, for Origen, this present time was a time for testing which he envisaged by means of divine *paideia*. God tested the soul through trials. Even in his biblical commentary on the *Song*, Origen maintained the notion that, despite her perfection, the soul was tested by God. Origen related such testing to the coming of “affliction” (θλίψις) for the soul.³² We need to notice –in advance– that Origen did not distinguish between various levels of divine *paideia*. For him, the most important aspect of trials was the fact that, in any case, God was testing the soul regardless of the stage of her spiritual progress. Characteristically, unlike the later ascetical development, Origen treated Paul and Job’s experience indistinguishably: both biblical figures were tested by God.³³ Origen did not emphasise their perfection before trials. Nevertheless, he highlighted their perfection during trials:³⁴ “to face tribulations it is not of the things that are up to us. But to be displeased and give in belong to the blameworthy matters that are up to us”.³⁵ Paul and Job were not displeased with God. They did not turn

²⁹ Origen, *27Nm*. 5-6. Cf. Ro 5:3-5 and 8:18.

³⁰ Cf. Origen, *Orat.* 11.2. Origen emphasised the notion of perfection predicated by the adjective “then” which suggested an eschatological orientation.

³¹ Cheek, *Eschatology and Redemption*, 119.

³² Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos*, PG 12, 1137 [Ps 4:2]: “Ὅτι δὲ θλίψις ὁ τοῖς ἁγίοις διδόμενος πειρασμός ἀθλοῦσιν καλεῖται, ἀπὸ πολλῶν ῥητῶν κινούμεθα” (that the tribulation that is given to the saints that fight is called temptation, we know it from many sayings). Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 3.4.1. In this case, Origen maintained a more cosmological understanding of temptations, relating them to the soul’s engrossment due to sin.

³³ Origen, *Orat.* 29.5 and 30.1-2. Idem, *Fragmenta in Psalmos 1-150*, 16.7. Idem, *Homiliae in Job* (in *catenis*), 26. Job underwent trials in terms of avoiding the presence of *pride*. Origen did not allude to Paul at this instance.

³⁴ Cf. Didymos, *In Psalmos 20-21*, 25.4 [21.2 in PTA 7].

³⁵ Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos*, PG 12, 1137: “Τὸ μὲν θλίβεσθαι οὐκ ἂν εἴη τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν. τὸ δὲ δυσαραστεῖσθαι καὶ ἐνδιδόναι τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ψεκτῶν”.

against God during their tribulations. In the same fashion, the bride of the *Song* maintained her ethical purity; and the martyrs of the *Ad Martyrium* kept their faith pure.³⁶

For Origen, such trials did not address only the individual. Trials were viewed within the scope of the Church's persecutions. It was observed earlier that Origen did not dissociate the life of the individual from the life of the Church. The presence of the martyrs affected Origen's theological thought concerning the content of such trials: the life of the faithful was put under to the test during the times of the persecution of the Church. However, Origen did not discern between ethical trials and actual persecution: both terms were interrelated and inter-dependent.

Origen also did not envisage divine abandonment in spatial terms of separation.³⁷ Divine abandonment was interpreted in terms of the divine assistance. God was always present at times of trials, observing the disposition of the devotee. Thus, he was intervening to assist and "refresh" his devotee. It seems that Origen did not distinguish between the righteous and the unrighteous: despite the fact that rational creatures were estranged from God, for Origen, God was remaining in proximity even to those "estranged" beings.³⁸ Addressing the life of the martyrs, Origen highlighted the closeness of God during their trials. As soon as the martyrs manifested their love, they heard: "the Lord is here".³⁹ Thus, Origen connected the divine presence to testing and the manifestation of faith from the part of the devotee. God was observing their life before sending his assistance. Silently, Origen was pointing to divine providence and pedagogy.

When commenting on the fourth gospel, Origen introduced a different theological stand. He noticed that Christ had not extended his presence in Samaria and Cana for more than two and three days respectively. From the historical narrative, Origen moved to the mystical meaning: the Samaritans and the Canaanites

³⁶ Origen, *Homiliae in Job* (in catenis), 18 [PG 12, 1033]. The biblical image of Job was linked to the martyrs.

³⁷ Origen, *Orat.* 20.2.

³⁸ In an obscure passage, Origen indicated that those beings that did not participate in God's being maintained a spark of divine effulgence. Jay and Greer provided two diverging translations. Jay's translation supported an ontological reading where Origen had referred to the distinction between God's nature and the nature of the rational creatures that participated in God's existence through a kind of divine effulgence. However, Greer's translation suggested an ethical point of view: Origen had argued the condition of those beings that remained estranged from God. Though the original Greek is obscure and seems to support Jay's translation, the inclusion of the passage within an ethical discourse where Origen did not include any cosmological speculations, seems to favour Greer's translation.

³⁹ Origen, *Martyr.* 42. Origen, *Orat.* 20.2. Cf. Is 40:10 and 62:11.

were both allegories for the “minds” (νοῦς) of the faithful souls. For Origen, Christ’s attitude could be interpreted in terms of his closeness and also separation from the human mind. The Logos was descending to the mind. However, there seems to be an impetus that forbade the Logos to remain united to the mind for a longer time. It seems that, in Origen, the mind had a limited capacity in its intellectual conception of the divine. But this was not so because of the natural incapacity of the mind. For Origen juxtaposed the perfect mind --that he designated as the “disciples”-- to the mind of the faithful souls (“Samaritans-Canaanites”). The Logos was united with the former but he was departing from the latter.⁴⁰ Thus, Origen introduced the dialectic between divine proximity and hiddenness at another level: the Logos’ closeness to the human mind. Once more, it was not sin that caused the Logos’ departure. The Logos was instructing the “Canaanites” and “Samaritans” about their ethical imperfection.

In his work *De Oratione*, Origen reflected on the antinomy that Christ’s claims contained: Christ had indicated the presence of the divine Kingdom within the human soul⁴¹. But, he had also taught to inquire for the coming of the divine kingdom: “thy Kingdom come”. For Origen, this antinomy highlighted the various gradations of divine wisdom that the human *nous* could attain to: the more the soul was ascending, the more she was discovering the kingdom within.⁴² Origen’s approach to this matter could shed light on the distinction between the “disciples” and the “Canaanites”. The latter were on their way to perfection experiencing the presence of the divine groom, but also anticipating his future coming in the human mind.

An important point of Origen’s ethical theory needs to be considered before moving any further: i.e., the degree to which Origen envisaged Christ as an ethical

⁴⁰ The condition of the “disciples” with whom the Logos was united without ever departing from them, and the condition of the minds that were subjected to divine withdrawal, introduced the ethical variations of the spiritual life. Rather than juxtaposing the two conditions, Origen saw the condition of the *disciples* as the summit of spiritual life: from the imperfect condition, the minds were advancing in order to be fully united with the Logos. This condition was a step higher in the spiritual life. Thus, whereas for the souls still progressing, the divine Groom was present and then absent, for the perfect souls, he was united with them inseparably. At an advanced level of spiritual progress, the Logos was remaining united to the mind. Origen’s biblical exegesis on the *Song of Songs* elucidated this point further: the Logos departed from the soul until she was introduced to another spiritual condition (chamber); i.e. the condition of absolute union with the divine. Origen, *Commentariis in Evangelium Joannis*, 13.52.347 [pg 224 in SC 222]. It needs to be noticed that Origen did not argue in terms of mystical experiences. He clearly addressed the notion of understanding the presence of the Logos through the scriptures. Whereas some souls failed to discern and grasp his presence behind the scriptural passages, the *disciples* had gained divine illumination, and thus discerned his presence.

⁴¹ Lk 17:20-21.

⁴² Origen, *Orat.* 25.2.

example, i.e. a model of action. Origen was directed by the scriptures in his ethical approach. He was also influenced by the ethical thought of Clement of Alexandria who had highlighted the need for ethical purification. However, Origen envisaged the image of the martyrs as ethical examples. The influence of the cult of the Christian martyrs was witnessed by the fact that Origen composed his *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* to reinforce the faith of his patron Ambrose during persecution.⁴³ Origen's time was saturated with the presence of the Christian martyrs. Origen's father was a martyr.⁴⁴ Origen came close to martyrdom many times.⁴⁵ He witnessed the persecution of the bishops of the Church in Rome, Alexandria and Antioch during the persecution of Decius.⁴⁶

Clement of Alexandria had discussed the value of martyrdom in his *Stromata* before Origen.⁴⁷ Origen followed Clement in many aspects of his thought. For Origen, the martyrs were examples of Christian devotion since they offered their lives to God. Origen pointed to their *faith* and also *perseverance* during their martyrdom. Origen placed the theme of *love* at the heart of his exhortation to martyrdom: through martyrdom the martyrs were manifesting their love for God.⁴⁸ According to King's examination of the commentary on the *Song of Songs*, there was an undeniable connection between Origen's exegetical work and the presence of the cult of the martyrs. Indeed, for Origen, the martyrs underwent the "winter" of trials of the biblical bride. They followed the "hard path", and through their trials, they were tested by God.⁴⁹ Thus, God addressed them in the same terms that he addressed

⁴³ It is the persecution of Maximin the Thracian (A.D. 235). The book was addressed to Origen's patron Ambrose and the priest Protocetus. Crouzel, *Origen*, 16-17.

⁴⁴ During the persecution of Septimius Severus in A.D. 202. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.1.1. Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 118.92b. Crouzel ruled out as fictitious the story preserved by Eusebius that Origen exhorted his father to martyrdom when he was probably only 14 years old.

⁴⁵ For Eusebius, Origen developed his desire (ἔρωος) for martyrdom due to his father death. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.2.3.

⁴⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.39.1.

⁴⁷ Cf. Clement, *Stromata*, 4.1.1.1ff. If we take into consideration the parallel scriptural quotations (e.g. Ro 5:3-5, Mt 7:14) between Origen and Clement, it seems that Origen knew the work of Clement when he was composing his own exhortation. In fact, the two authors shared with each other the centrality of desire (πόθος) and good disposition (προαίρεσις), the confession of faith through martyrdom (ὁμολογία), the notion of ethical purification as part of martyrdom, and also the theme of hope (ἐλπίδα) as an ideal transcending martyrdom, and perseverance (ὑπομονή) as part of the ethical life.

⁴⁸ Origen, *Martyr*. 2 and also 48. Origen referred to the soul's testing by alluding to Mt 7:24-28.

⁴⁹ Origen brought into play the notion of *gnosis*. Through their trials, the martyrs were demonstrating the knowledge of the divine that they had acquired. In the next passage Origen addressed idolatry. Thus, he juxtaposed between the demonstration of knowledge of the true faith from the martyrs and the fall into idolatry for the unrighteous. Origen, *Martyr*. 31 and 32.

the biblical bride: “the winter has passed”.⁵⁰ Origen understood this winter in terms of the afflictions caused by the idolatrous persecutors. But according to Origen, it was the demonic wrath that was motivating the latter.⁵¹ Thus, Origen saw in the life of the martyrs the application of the exegetical connection between trials, divine pedagogy and love for the divine.

Through their trials, the martyrs became the true fellows of Christ. In Origen, the image of Christ was addressed in terms of an ethical exemplar only through the life of the martyrs. For Origen, the martyrs stood at the place of the Mosaic priests, offering their lives to God: Christ was the *High Priest* that accepted the sacrifice of the martyrs. The primary action of Christ as the *High Priest* was in offering his own life.⁵² Thus, the martyrs were following the true *High Priest*: imitating Christ, the martyrs were priests and victims at the same time: the former by means of the action of offering; the latter in terms of becoming the object of the sacrifice.⁵³ Thus, they constituted the continuation of Christ’s sacrifice. After his death on the cross, the martyrs were the new victims, renewing his sacrifice through their martyrdom.⁵⁴ Origen’s ethical theory was infused with the Eucharistic concept of Christ’s sacrifice extending to the life of the faithful. Through their trials, the martyrs became “mystical communicants” of Christ’s passion. They shared with Christ the “cup” of Mt 20:22 which, for Origen, signified Christ’s passion.⁵⁵ But also, they partook in Christ’s comfort. Origen highlighted the bond between death and resurrection: sharing in the passion also meant sharing in Christ’s triumph (i.e resurrection). Thus, it is the image of the martyrs that has emerged as the application of Origen’s ethical

⁵⁰ Sol 2:10-11.

⁵¹ In his biblical commentary and the *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, Origen related the presence of persecutors and demons to idolatry. The demons were afflicting the souls of the martyrs by imposing the denial of faith on the minds of the confessors. The persecutors were the demon’s puppets that were trying to force the martyrs back to idolatry. For Origen, the biblical bride had passed from idolatry to faith. The persecutors were forcing the martyrs to return to idolatry. It needs to be noticed that idolatry, for Origen, referred to a distorted notion of the divine. Thus, in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Origen related the inner stirring of thoughts to ethical trials. In the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* the *Exhortatium*, Origen identified the demons with the gods of the gentiles. Origen, *Martyr*. 9 and 32.

⁵² He 7:27; 10:12.

⁵³ In fact, the martyrs, as priest, were depicted by Origen as standing in front of the sacrificial altar offering their lives. This image was an allusion to the liturgical custom of using the tombs of the martyrs as altars for the Holy Sacrifice.

⁵⁴ Origen, *Commentariis in Evangelium Joannis*, 6.54.280 [pg 342 in SC 157].

⁵⁵ The language that Origen employed had Eucharistic implications. The martyrs were cleansed through Christ’s sacrifice, and participated in his sacrifice through their giving up their lives. However, Origen implied a literal understanding of the Eucharistic participation in Christ’s sacrifice by addressing the death of the martyrs in terms of sacrifice.

discourse concerning divine love, perseverance during trials, the following of the “*hard path*” and the comforts yet to come. It was this “Eucharistic” relation between Christ and the martyrs that highlighted martyrdom by means of “imitating” the passion and also the glory of Christ. For Origen, imitation meant participation in the sacrifice and glorification of Christ.

For Origen, Christ was the manifestation of the divine on earth. He was also the author of salvation. This salvation was the result of the action of God intervening within history. Origen overlooked the ethical aspect of Christ’s life, since Christ’s life signified the change from ignorance to knowledge and from idolatry to faith. Thus, it was the martyrs that were the ethical models of Christian life for Origen. In an obscure passage in the *Exhortatium*, Origen presented Christ as an example of humility: Christ did not avoid dying on the cross, accepting a shameful death.⁵⁶ For Origen, Christ’s *kenosis* meant his descent from the bosom of the Father to the world and death. The term *kenosis* highlighted the contrast between the glory of the Logos and the poverty of the passion. However, Origen did not emphasise Christ’s life as an ethical example any further. The identity and mission of Christ pointed to Christ’s role with regard to the redemptive orientation of human history. Thus, Origen overlooked the ethical meaning of Christ’s life in terms of imitating the external types of his life. The only point that Origen brought into play was the notion of the voluntary acceptance of poverty by Christ.

Within his ethical discourse, Origen introduced a vocabulary that highlighted the “perseverance” (ὑπομονή), “confession” (ὁμολογία), and also “steadfastness” (προθυμία) of the martyrs who were designated as “athletes” (ἀθληταί)⁵⁷. They were fighting against the “enemy of truth” (ἐχθρὸς τῆς ἀληθείας), i.e., the persecutors/demons. Thus, Origen had set the language that was employed by the desert ascetics with regard to the Christian ethical life.

Origen set the “great currents of Christian spirituality”.⁵⁸ He presented two diverging traditions that either indicated the unhindered journey of the soul to the divine (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*) or anticipated the presence of trials and

⁵⁶ Origen, *Martyr*. 37.

⁵⁷ Origen, *Martyr*. 1. The martyrs experienced trials and temptations, accepting *tribulations* and expecting the *hope* that was to be manifest “yet a little while”. Cf. Is 28:9 and Ro 5:3-5.

⁵⁸I have paraphrased from I. Hausherr, ‘Great Currents of Eastern Spirituality’, *EsChQ* 2 (1937), 111-121 and 175-185.

temptations throughout the spiritual journey of the soul (*De Oratione, Exhortatum ad Martyrium*, and *Homiliae in Numeros.*). However, Origen did not contrast between the two theological stands: the former emphasised the spiritual end that the soul was called to achieve (divine union). This stand focused on the action of God within history, and highlighted the soul's response to the divine call. Thus, Origen shed light on the works of God for the faithful soul. The other stand exemplified the ethical life that the soul needed to follow in order to reach perfection. This theological position took into account the soul's natural frailty. What united the two theological positions was the dialectical form that divine presence and absence acquired in Origen's thought. For him, it was divine *paideia* that was leading the soul to spiritual fulfillment. Thus, in his work, Origen illustrated the various ways in which God was intervening in the life of the soul. Origen's orientation was eschatological: divine *paideia* was leading the soul to the fulfillment of her union with the divine. God suspended redemptive time, thus preventing (from) and also redeeming the soul of her immanent natural weakness. In any case, Origen's ethical discourse on ethical trials and spiritual resting manifested divine presence within an eschatological perspective as "here but not yet".⁵⁹

2. The *Vita Antonii* and the *Letters of Antony*.

The work *Vita Antonii* was of significant importance for the emergence of Christian asceticism. There had been considerable criticism about the attribution of the work to Athanasius in the past. However, modern scholarship has established this as Athanasian authorship.⁶⁰ Still, the question concerning the hagiographical depiction of Antony remains open. There are good reasons to advocate the authenticity of Antony's life. However, we also need to take into consideration that Athanasius was working on the classical form of biographies. This genre shaped and highlighted individual elements according to contemporary needs.⁶¹ The work was popular among the desert ascetical communities, and it influenced the shaping of Christian ascetical theory.

⁵⁹ Cheek, *Eschatology and Redemption*, 215. Cf. Turner, *Eros and Allegory*.

⁶⁰ See the introduction in Athanasius, *Vie d'Antoine*, G. J. M. Bartelink (ed.), CS 400 (1994), 27ff. G. Garitte, 'Histoire du texte imprimé de la vie grecque de S. Antoine', *Bulletin de l'institut historique* 22 (1942-1943), 5-29. Idem, 'Le Texte et les versions anciennes de la vie de Saint Antoine', *Studia Anselmiana* 38 (1956), 1-12.

⁶¹ Cf. D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

The *Letters of Antony* have been subjected to scholarly scrutiny with regard to the interlinked problems of authorship and authenticity. According to Rubenson's review of the past scholarly work on the subject, the Antonian authorship needs to be established due to internal and also external evidence.⁶² Rubenson examined the Origenist elements that the letters contain. He attempted to establish a firm relation between the *Vita Antonii* and the *Letters of Antony* based on common theological lines, and also the common depiction of Antony. Rubenson attributed the Origenist elements of the *Letters* to Antony: he rejected the Athanasian indication of Antony's illiteracy as misleading. According to Rubenson, the degree to which Athanasius' claim should be taken at face value is limited. Athanasius illustrated Antony as an illiterate monk who was confronting pagan philosophers and Arian adversaries adequately. That Antony was illiterate does not exclude the fact that he might have encountered Origenist positions in the desert that he employed and expressed in his *Letters*. But what has remained unaddressed so far is the influence of Origenist theology on Athanasius in the light of the latter's biographical composition. Scholarly research has only examined the classical forms behind Athanasius' narrative.

In the present chapter we will attempt to discern Origenist ethical elements in Athanasius' biography and the *Letters of Antony*. In doing so, we will trace the emergence of the monastic ideals through the transition from Origenist intellection to ethical discourse.

The *Vita Antonii* witnessed the progressive emergence of the desert asceticism. The ascetics were the new Christian martyrs in terms of devoting their lives to God. Though Athanasius was working on the classical genre of biographies, he employed the Origenist vocabulary that depicted Antony as the new "athlete" and "martyr" whose witness (μαρτυρία) was manifested through ethical struggles.⁶³ Athanasius

⁶² S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint*, Bibliotheca Historico-Ecclesiastica Lundensis 24 (Lund: Lund University Press, 1990), 35.

⁶³ Cf. *Acta Justinii et Septem Sodalium*, 5.1: "Οἱ δὲ ἅγιοι μάρτυρες δοξάζοντες τὸν θεόν, ἐξεληθόντες ἐπὶ τὸν συνήθη τόπον ἐτελείωσαν τὸ μαρτύριον ἐν τῇ τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν ὁμολογίᾳ". For Gregg and Groh, Athanasius depicted Antony after the "biblical presentations of the prophets, disciples, martyrs, and angels". Athanasius also borrowed themes from the classical era such as the depiction of Pythagoras from Apollonius of Tyana. Gregg and Cohs, *Arianism*, 133. Cf. Apollonius, *Ἱστορίαι Θαυμάσιαι*, 6.1ff. G. Quispel, 'L'Évangile selon Thomas et les origines de l'ascèse chrétienne', in *Gnostic Studies II*, Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 35/2 (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1975), 98.

illustrated Antony's *steadfastness*⁶⁴ and *perseverance*⁶⁵ while the latter was experiencing the fierce attacks of demons.⁶⁶ Most significantly, Athanasius highlighted the motif of Antony's love for the divine. It is in this sense that Antony chose spiritual struggles over the pleasures of the present life.⁶⁷ The *Vita Antonii* signalled the transition from the era of the martyrs to the era of the desert ascetics. For Athanasius, Antony was the new martyr pursuing ethical purification.

Athanasius illustrated Antony's spiritual warfare in the desert. The ascetic did not struggle with inner passions --as the later ascetics--. His warfare was against the devil and the demons. It was the devil that attacked Antony, stirring thoughts and passions within him. However, Athanasius' ethical theory had a long way to go before reaching the later development of ethical discourse: for Athanasius, the passions were not inner dispositions of the fractured soul. The depiction of the devil was not a concrete expression of the soul's inner disposition. The passions were stirred from external stimuli.⁶⁸ The demons were identified with the pagan Gods (Origen). They attacked Antony only when he intruded their habitation --i.e. tomb. Their intention was to drag Antony away from the territory. In the beginning, they affected his thoughts;⁶⁹ then his body.⁷⁰ Eventually, they appeared to him in bodily forms and attacked him leaving him half-dead.⁷¹

Athanasius devised a turning point in Antony's life that divided his biography into two parts, i.e. before and after the event: this event is the manifestation of the

⁶⁴ Athanasius, *Vita*, 5.1 [PG 26, 845] and 7.5 [852].

⁶⁵ Athanasius, *Vita*, 10.3 [860] and 51.2 [917].

⁶⁶ Cf. *Acta Justinii et Septem Sodalium*, 5.1 [in TLG]: "□Ο ἐπαρχος Ἰουστίνῳ λέγει: Ἐὰν μαστιγῶθῃς ἀποκεφαλίσθῃς, πέπεισαι ὅτι μέλλεις ἀναβαίνειν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν; Ἰουστίνος εἶπεν: Ἐλπίζω ἐκ τῆς ὑπομονῆς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν: οἶδα δὲ ὅτι καὶ τοῖς ὀρθῶς βιώσασιν παραμένει τὸ θεῖον χάρισμα μέχρι τῆς ἐκπύρωσεως" (The eparch said to Justin: if you are beheaded after being lashed, are you convinced that you will be raised into heaven? Justin said: I hope to perseverance if I persevere; I know that to those that conduct their life correctly, the holy gift remains until the conflagration).

⁶⁷ Athanasius, *Vita*, 9.3 [PG 26, 856] and 14.6 [865].

⁶⁸ The Stoics had defined passions as the wrong judgements of the reason. Clement had indicated that the passions were excessive motions of the irrational part of the soul that were "disobedient" to the rational part. For Clement, the passions were irrational and connected to the functions of the body and the senses. Cf. Clement, *Stromata*, 2.13.59. For the Stoic and Clement's ethical theory see Lilla, "Ethical Theory", in *Clement of Alexandria*, 60-117. In Athanasius, one gets a glimpse of the later ascetical connection between demons and the irrational motions of the soul. See R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (London: University of California Press, 1971). Also, Brakke, *Demons and the Monk*.

⁶⁹ Athanasius, *Vita*, 5.2 [848].

⁷⁰ Athanasius, *Vita*, 5.4 [848].

⁷¹ Athanasius, *Vita*, 8.2 [856].

divine presence in light.⁷² Athanasius' account shared common themes with similar accounts in Philo, Plotinus and also Porphyry's biography for Plotinus. The common motif was that of a sudden appearance of light. According to Philo, the ascetic (ἀσκητής) sought for divine wisdom. The latter would suddenly appear to him after much pain and efforts.⁷³ In Philo, this appearance was in terms of light.⁷⁴ Both Plotinus and Porphyry had related the theme of divine presence in terms of a sudden apparition of light.⁷⁵

In the *Vita*, Antony was attacked by demons. In a dramatic turn of events, a ray of light suddenly descended upon him.⁷⁶ The ascetic was relieved from his bodily pain, while the demons fled.⁷⁷ Antony immediately identified this light with the divine presence. The question that he addressed indicated familiarity with his interlocutor: "where were you"?

A closer look at the incident highlights the presence of Origenist ethical themes: though Antony suffered bodily wounds, he was remaining watchful (γρηγορῶν, νήφωv). As a response to the demonic affections through his body, he was fasting.⁷⁸ Despite of all the afflictions, he remained firm in prayer. In his *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, Origen had asked for endurance in trials, pointing to the fact that comfort was at hand.

But commend yourselves 'in every way as the ministers of God': through great 'endurance', saying, 'And now, what is my endurance? Is it not the Lord?'; in 'afflictions', persuaded that 'many are the afflictions of the righteous'; in 'necessities', so that we may ask for the blessedness necessary for us; in 'difficult straits', so that by travelling steadily on the straitened and narrow path we may arrive at life. If it is necessary, let us commend ourselves also 'in beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, and fasting'. For behold, the *Lord is here*, and His reward is in His hand to give to each according to his works.⁷⁹

⁷² Athanasius, *Vita*, 10.1-4 [PG 26, 860]. The literal analysis of the scene could indicate that the divine intervention was reminiscent of the classical *deus ex machina*. For Anatolios, the importance of the scene was highlighted by Athanasius' reference to Antony's age during the incident. Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 184.

⁷³ Philo, *Quod Deus est Immutabilis*, 93.

⁷⁴ Unquestionably, Philo was influenced by Plato. Cf. Plato, *Respublica*, 515c4ff; *Epistulae*, 341c5 and also *Parmenides*, 156d2 and *Symposium*, 210e1ff. However, we could not overlook the increasing importance of light in terms of divine revelation in the later apocryphal literature of Judaism. See McGinn, *The Foundations*, 14ff. According to McGinn, the destruction of the Temple urged late Judaism to introduce the notion of a direct and unmediated experience of the divine through visions and apparitions.

⁷⁵ Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 13. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.3.17.

⁷⁶ Cf. Ps 117:7. Athanasius, *Vita*, 6.4 [PG 26, 852].

⁷⁷ For Athanasius, there was an escalation in the demonic attacks: the attacked through thoughts; then they afflicted Antony's body through illness. Eventually, they took visible form and thus wounded his body severely.

⁷⁸ Athanasius, *Vita*, 9.8 [PG 26,857].

⁷⁹ Origen, *Martyr*. 42 [my italics].

Origen had borrowed his vocabulary from the Pauline exhortation to trials and sufferings: for Origen, the way of the martyrs was that of “beatings”, “tumults”, “efforts”, “vigilance”, and “fasting”. For every affliction, Origen provided a scriptural quotation to strengthen the martyrs-to-be. The same theological line was also introduced by Athanasius. His martyr, i.e. Antony, persevered in trials and sufferings by fasting and remaining vigilant. He was also reciting biblical passages that acknowledged that the divine assistance was at hand.⁸⁰ Antony cited scriptural passages that corresponded to the demonic attacks.

The biographical account shared common themes with the Origenist exhortation. Athanasius’ Antony expressed the Origenist motif of divine closeness during trials. Antony experienced what Origen had promised for the devotee: Christ manifested his closeness to his devotee in the presence of light. God drew near his martyr, calling at him and offering his reward: “Antony, I was here”. The latter expression corresponds to Origen’s “the Lord is here”. Athanasius highlighted the notion of *athlesis* as testing: Christ did not intervene before observing Antony’s *athlesis*.⁸¹ Thus, he offered his reward to Antony.

We need to address some further observation. At this point, we need to draw our attention to the expression “having felt the assistance”⁸² in the Athanasian account. Antony did not hesitate in identifying the apparition with the divine presence. His words, “where were you”, illustrated familiarity. The apparition brought deliverance from his physical pain: his body was relieved from its wounds. The two points are interrelated: it is due to the apparition that Antony identified his interlocutor with Christ.⁸³ His deliverance from bodily pain informed him about the identity of his interlocutor. The experience was not limited to an intellectual level --in a Plotinian or Philonian fashion. We need to take into consideration the participle “αἰσθόμενος” which is a predicate to “ἀντιλήψις”. Through the language of the senses, Athanasius argued the reality of the apparition.⁸⁴ In his work, Origen had favoured

⁸⁰ Ps 117:7. 1Kgs 18:15. Phil 3:13.

⁸¹ The ascetic was afflicted by passions only because of the fierce attack from the devil. Athanasius did not connect this to the presence of sin as a spiritual factor in Antony’s life.

⁸² Athanasius, *Vita*, 10.2 [PG 26, 860]: “αἰσθόμενος τῆς ἀντιλήψεως”.

⁸³ As opposed to the presence of the adversary: in the latter case, Antony inquired about his identity: “who are you that you talk to me like that? –I am the friend of fornication”. Athanasius, *Vita*, 6.2 [PG 26,849].

⁸⁴ In doing so, Athanasius illustrated his dependence on Origen and the latter’s theological position concerning the correspondence between bodily and spiritual senses.

the notion of spiritual *sense* (αἴσθησις);⁸⁵ Athanasius introduced the participle αἰσθανόμενος in his text.⁸⁶ For Athanasius, divine presence was felt at an empirical level --as opposed to a strict intellectualism.⁸⁷ Behind these lines, Athanasius might have been rejecting the Gnostic intellectual character of union with the divine. Athanasius stressed the participation of the body in the divine apparition: Antony saw the light and felt bodily relief from his wounds.

The dialogue between the ascetic and his interlocutor introduced the notion of divine presence and absence. Antony's question pointed in the direction of divine absence: he was left on his own. Surprisingly, and unlike biblical sources --e.g. Ps 22.2-- Antony inquired first about "where" and then "why" with regard to God's presence.⁸⁸ Athanasius introduced the antinomy that though Christ was present, Antony felt his absence which Athanasius defined in terms of God postponing his intervention. It was discussed that Origen had introduced the dialectical nature of divine presence and absence: God was leaving the soul subject to trials without intervening. Yet, he was at hand. Antony's interlocutor denied any spatial separation between him and his ascetic: for Athanasius, Antony experienced divine hiddenness. Athanasius could not have come closer to Origen's theme of divine proximity and hiddenness. Such hiddenness was understood in terms of postponing his intervention.

Unlike Origen's allusion to Is 58:9, "Lo, here am I",⁸⁹ the Athanasian "Antony, I was here", was not a direct citation from a biblical verse. But even Origen

⁸⁵ Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.48.27 and 7.39.44. Also idem, *Fragmenta in Evangelium Joannis* (in catenis), 20.1 [number of fragment in GCS 10]. Idem, *Fragment in Lucam* (in catenis), 186.44 [pg 306 in GCS 49]. For Clement, faith began at the level of the senses and was transformed into divine knowledge.

⁸⁶ Behind the language of vision lies the classical Greek theory of optics as means to know an object. Unlike modern notions of sight defined as the abstraction created from the image of the object that has appeared in the encephalic centre through the neurones stimulated by the eye lenses, the classical Greek theory supported empirical knowledge of objects through interchanging "fires" between subject and object (συναύγεια) that were united through a third light (i.e. the sun); the objects were conceived epistemologically through their mutual participation in sight. See S. Ramfos, 'Θεωρία', in *Παρόν Φώς τοῦ Κόσμου* (Athens: Armos, 2006). 221-116. For Ramfos, the knowledge of an object is empirical (including both mind and body) as opposed to the mere abstraction of the mind (intellectualism).

⁸⁷ The body participated in the scene through the sense of sight and the relief from pain.

⁸⁸ Surprisingly, instead of a Davidic inquiry or even glorification, Antony's address was that of a modern lover that is waiting for his love: "where have you been? Why did you not..."? Cf. Ps 9:22. Only the second part of the inquiry resembled the lamentation psalms. The lack of biblical foundation for Antony's answer advocates for the authenticity of the incident: Antony was not following any biblical or classical example.

⁸⁹ The editor has cross-referenced Is 40:10 and 60:12 due to the fact that both passages refer to the presence of the Lord and the rewards that he brings to the soul. However, it is more likely that Origen had in mind Is 58:9 which he had alluded to several times in his exegetical works in order to point out

paraphrased, as opposed to citing *verbatim* from Is 58:9. It might be the case that Athanasius also paraphrased the Origenist response. Though Athanasius used the scriptures extensively in his *Vita Antonii*,⁹⁰ this was the only place that Athanasius did not cite directly from the scriptures. More likely, Athanasius found this expression of divine closeness in Origen whom he paraphrased. Both authors shared the adverb “here” as a predicate of space to show divine closeness and also contrast it to divine hiddenness.

Another ethical position that Athanasius shared with Origen was the aftermath of the divine presence: after the apparition of light, Antony was not confronted by the demons any more. The ascetic was depicted as a conqueror over the demonic powers. The passions ceased to be stirred inside him, and the devil’s fierce wrath ceased to affect him. According to the biographical account, Antony was never approached by the demons again.⁹¹ For Athanasius, Antony became a God-bearing man.⁹² As in the case of the biblical bride, Antony has remained unhindered in his ascension to ethical perfection. It seems that Athanasius was following a strand of thought that Origen had introduced. But, this is not to say that Athanasius copied from Origen uncritically. Most probably, Athanasius was familiar with the idea of depicting ethical perfection as achievable in this life.

The point on which Athanasius differed from Origenist tradition was his emphasis on the incarnation. Anatolios has examined Athanasius’ ethical theory in the context of his Christology.⁹³ According to Anatolios, Athanasius introduced his ethical theory in terms of the efficacy of the incarnation. Athanasius stressed the relationship between the human and divine within the context of *synergy*. This

the closeness of God at times of trials. Cf. Origen, *Orat.* 10.1. Idem, *Selecta in Psalmos*, PG 12, 1121 [Ps 3:2]. It was also favoured in his exegesis on the *Song of Songs* where he had argued God’s presence being at hand. See Origen, *Hom.* 1.2.269.

⁹⁰ The index of scriptural citations is quite extensive in the edition of the *Vita* for SC 400.

⁹¹ Even the wickedest creatures of an irrational nature (such as reptiles) had fled at the presence of Antony. Cf. Athanasius, *Vita*, 12.4 [PG 26, 861]. This passage was an allusion to the previous attack of the demons in the form of reptiles in *Vita*, 9.5 [857]. For Athanasius, not only the reptiles, but also the demons had fled when confronting Antony. Cf. Athanasius, *Vita*, 13.1-2 [861-864].

⁹² Athanasius, *Vita*, 14.2 [PG 26, 864]: “[π]ροῆλθεν ὁ Ἀντώνιος ὡς περ ἐκ τινος ἀδούτου μεμυσταγωγημένος καὶ θεοφορούμενος” (Antony came forth as from a sanctuary instructed in the divine mysteries and God-bearing).

⁹³ Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 177ff. Also Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*. Anatolios addressed modern criticism about the meaning of *synergy* in Athanasius’ thought, specifically in his *Vita Antonii*. Anatolios supported that Athanasius viewed synergy in equal terms from both parts: God bestowed his grace. But the ascetic needed to respond to this divine action. According to Anatolios, the acquisition of divine grace was not only a matter of human volition but required an interaction between God and man. Cf. Gregg and Groh, ‘Claims on the Life of St. Antony’, in *Arianism*, 133ff.

synergy was discernible in the act of creation and also the incarnation.⁹⁴ The divine power became manifest in the incarnation through Christ's body. This divine power passed to his disciples who became the recipients of his grace. For Athanasius, Antony was such a recipient of divine power. He experienced the divine grace that was working from within him as an outcome of the incarnation.⁹⁵ Origen had viewed the incarnation in terms of the soul's conversion from idolatry to faith. Athanasius corrected this view by introducing the results of the incarnation in more concrete terms: humanity was transformed through the incarnation. Origen acquired a distinctly eschatological position that maintained the tension between the kingdom within and the kingdom to come. Athanasius --striving against Docetism and Arianism-- illustrated the results of the incarnation. The recipients of divine grace defeated death and the demons: Antony merged from the tomb without any sign of bodily decay.⁹⁶ For Athanasius, Antony was a "receiver of God" (θεοδόχος),⁹⁷ because Christ had already defeated death and the devil in his own flesh.⁹⁸ Athanasius composed his work at a time that Gnosticism in Egypt was questioning the role of the incarnation, diminishing the role of ethical life for the favour of intellectualism: salvation was understood in terms of an intellectual ascension to the divine. In his *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius defended the ethical value of the incarnation and introduced his position --found already in Irenæus-- concerning the participation of both the body and the mind in deification.⁹⁹ Antony was not a "bodiless" man, but a "God-bearing" man. In doing so, Athanasius abolished the eschatological dimension of Origen's exegesis: Antony was already experiencing the transformation

⁹⁴ It was Antony's prayer in ethical vigilance that manifested Antony's part in the interaction with divine grace. Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 183ff.

⁹⁵ Athanasius, *Vita*, 40.6ff [PG 26, 901].

⁹⁶ Athanasius, *Vita*, 14.1ff [PG 26, 864-865].

⁹⁷ Gregg and Groh drew attention to the fact that, in Athanasian thought, the term implied the natural distinction between the Logos and men. It denied the Arian position that the faithful would enjoy the same relation with the Father that the Son was enjoying. Gregg and Groh, *Arianism*, 147 citing from Athanasius.

⁹⁸ Athanasius, *Vita*, 5.7 [PG 26, 849]: "Ὁ γὰρ νομίσας ὁμοίος γενέσθαι Θεῷ ὑπὸ νεανίσκου νῦν ἐπαίζετο: καὶ ὁ σαρκὸς καὶ αἵματος κατακαυχώμενος ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπου σάρκα φοροῦντος ἀνετρέπετο. Συνήργει γὰρ ὁ Κύριος αὐτῷ, ὁ σάρκα δι' ἡμᾶς φορέσας, καὶ τῷ σώματι δοὺς τὴν κατὰ τοῦ διαβόλου νίκη: ὥστε τῶν ὄντως ἀγωνιζομένων ἕκαστον λέγειν: "Ὁὐκ ἐγὼ δέ, ἀλλ' ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ σὺν ἐμοί"" (he who thought that he became equal to God was mocked by the youth; and he who boasted against all flesh and blood was overthrown by a man bearing flesh. For God was assisting him, he who took on flesh for us and gave his flesh for the victory over the devil; so that everyone that was truly fighting could say: "yet, not I, but the grace of God within me"). Cf. 1 Cor 15:10.

⁹⁹ Cf. B. Otis, 'Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent System'. Also N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Thought*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, OUP, 2004).

of humanity that resulted from the transformation that Christ achieved through the incarnation.

A parallel reading between the two works (*Vita-Letters*) indicates that Antony held a different view than Athanasius.¹⁰⁰ The illustrated Origenism of the *Letters* caused scholars to question their authenticity. It was mentioned earlier that Athanasius had stressed Antony's illiteracy.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, in the *Vita*, Athanasius introduced long discourses in which Antony was exposed to Origenist theological positions, such as the origin of demons. According to the biographical account, Antony had sufficient knowledge to confront the pagans and the Arians.¹⁰² The fact that Antony was illiterate could not single out the position that, in the desert, he was interacting with people that were well aware of Origenism –Athanasius was one of them. In the apophthegms attributed to Antony, Rubenson discerned possible Origenist elements that suffice to put under question Athanasius' information concerning Antony's illiteracy. Not to mention that, in any case, Antony might have dictated his epistles to a scribe.

Unlike the Athanasian conqueror over the passions, the Antony of the *Letters* introduced the theme of sin as the cause of ethical fall. According to Antony, it was *pride* that caused the original motion of the rational creatures from the uniform condition of the minds contemplating the divine. By falling, they were differentiated into the conditions of angels, men and demons.¹⁰³ Antony underlined the “great wound” of the fall that humanity was incapable of healing. Sin led to ignorance of humanity's nature as “intellectual substance”.¹⁰⁴ Thus, it was only through the advent of Christ that the human race was redeemed. Antony's vocabulary is similar to the Origenist language of the *De Principiis*.

Antony employed the Origenist theological position of time as part of God's pedagogy to turn humanity from sin. In this pedagogy, God was visiting his faithful through various manifestations which Antony called ‘visitations’, a term peculiar to Origenist thought:

¹⁰⁰ For a thorough analysis of the *Letters* with a review of the literature concerning the authorship, their relation to *Vita Antonii* and the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, and the Origenism of the desert literature see Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Anthony*.

¹⁰¹ Athanasius, *Vita*, 1.1 [PG 26, 841].

¹⁰² Athanasius, *Vita*, 68.2ff [941].

¹⁰³ Antony the Great, *The Letters*, trans. D. J. Chitty (Oxford: SLG, 1975), 6 [pg. 20 and 23]: “the beginning of their motion is the *pride* which came at the first”.

¹⁰⁴ Antony, *Lettrs.* 2 [pg. 6-7] and 3 [pg. 9].

Truly, my beloved in the Lord, not at one time only did God visit His creatures; but from the foundations of the world, whenever any have come to the Creator of all by the law of His covenant implanted in them, God is present with each one of these in His bounty and grace by His spirit.¹⁰⁵

Despite the fact that humanity had turned away from God, God manifested his presence in various ways, through the presence of the immanent natural law, and also the presence of biblical figures such as Moses and the prophets. The presence of the natural law as means of divine presence was well established in the thought of Clement of Alexandria who employed it to argue the divine presence even in the Greek philosophers. Through it, Antony stressed the notion of divine presence in various levels (nature-revelation). Most importantly, Antony introduced the dialectics of presence and absence: God was present within the history of the human race in various levels. Yet, he remained hidden. Moses, who stood for divine presence, was incapable of healing the human wound, and thus he withdrew.¹⁰⁶ The same was true of the prophets. For Antony, it was human sin that was causing this divine withdrawal: God manifested his presence; then, he was hiding.

The incarnation meant the healing of human sin. This redemption was understood in an Origenist fashion as the turn from ignorance to divine knowledge:

For as many as are set free by His dispensation, are called the servants of God. And this is not yet perfection, but in its own time it is righteousness and it leads to the adoption of sons.¹⁰⁷

The expression “not yet” indicated the relative temporal character of the adoption. The advent of Christ did not mean that humanity had reached perfection. It was Christ’s disciples that moved to the condition of adoption: being servants they became sons. But that was only through the advent of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the incarnation played a limited role in Antony’s thought: even though he had referred to the healing of humanity, Antony maintained a firm eschatological direction in his *Letters*: the righteousness that the incarnation brought was so in a relative sense, “in its own time”. Thus, as in the case of Gregory of Nyssa, Antony distinguished between perfection in this present life, and the eschatological completion of this perfection.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Antony, *Lettrs.* 2 [pg. 6].

¹⁰⁶ Antony, *Lettrs.* 5 [pg. 14-15].

¹⁰⁷ Antony, *Lettrs.* 2 [pg. 6].

¹⁰⁸ Antony illustrated the need for synergy: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not perfection as such. What was also needed was human ethical preparation. Anton. *Lettrs.* 2 [pg. 7].

Unlike the *Vita*, Antony did not deny the possibility of backsliding for the soul. In doing so, Antony illustrated his dependence on Origenist cosmology.¹⁰⁹ For Antony, the soul had moved from its original blessedness: “the beginning of their motion is the *pride* which came at the first”.¹¹⁰ The original motion was caused by *pride*. Antony defined *pride* as estrangement from God and the virtues.¹¹¹ Thus, Antony exhorted:

[I] want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life, but lack of discernment killed them.... if you neglect yourselves and do not discern your works, that you should fall into the hands of the devil, when you think you are near to God, and that in your expectation of the light, darkness should overtake you.¹¹²

Antony did not introduce the Origenist notion of the soul’s satiety. He shifted to a more ethically oriented discussion that anticipated Paphnutius’ ethical discourse in the *Lausiatic History*. Origen, however, had highlighted the presence of *pride* at an ethical level. Antony argued that ethical backsliding was possible when the soul had obtained considerable spiritual progress.¹¹³ Clearly, the introduction of *pride*, and also the reference to the Origenist origin of demons and men was meant to exhort to ethical efforts. Through the scheme of the various grades of the fall, Origen introduced the life of the soul within the body. The body was given to soul in order to struggle and develop. It seems that this is the reason Antony followed this Origenist theory: the fall of the minds to the condition of embodied humanity highlighted the material presence and exhorted to ethical efforts. It needs to be taken into consideration that Antony was addressing ascetics.

In his attempt to secure his disciples from *pride*, Antony transferred spiritual rest for an eschatological time. Thus, he highlighted the future acquisition of the *inheritance*, as Origen had referred to the future *hope*. According to Antony, “[w]ho ever saw God, to rejoice with Him and retain Him with himself, so that God should not leave him, but help him while he dwells in this heavy body”?¹¹⁴ Antony denied

¹⁰⁹ Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.12. For Antony, there was a triple motion that showed the subjection of the soul to passions: the first motion was related to the natural motions of the body. In this case, the passions were controlled by the soul. The second motion resulted from the natural abuse of natural needs such as hunger and thirst. According to Antony, an excess in the consumption of food and drink resulted in the passionate motion of the body. The third motion was due to the afflictions imposed on humanity by the demons’ envy. Cf. Antony, *Lettrs.* 1 [pg. 2-3].

¹¹⁰ Antony, *Lettrs.* 6 [pg. 23].

¹¹¹ Antony, *Lettrs.* 6 [pg. 22-23].

¹¹² Antony, *Lettrs. op. cit.*

¹¹³ Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.12.

¹¹⁴ Antony, *Lettrs.* 6 [pg. 20].

that God remained united with the soul in this present life. Thus, the Coptic ascetic indicated the tension between divine presence and absence –expressed through the language of *visitations* and separation as above. According to him, the ascetics needed to anticipate periods of divine presence and withdrawal. The presence and possibility of sin limited Antony’s ethical insights. His intention was to exhort ascetics to spiritual vigilance and warfare.

Athanasius composed his *Vita* as a hagiographical work to exalt the life and deeds of Antony. Athanasius intended to manifest Antony’s ethical integrity, and thus set the ideal image of what a monk should be like. Chapters 5.1-14.1 in *Vita Antonii* introduced Antony’s ethical struggles. Thus, Athanasius highlighted his achievements and vindicated his sanctity. His fame was based on the tribulations that he faced victoriously. Athanasius also underlined Antony’s disposition by indicating his struggles against the demonic presence. Antony’s struggles were depicted in terms of divine pedagogy. The ascetic was the new Christian martyr who was handed over in trials by God. Thus, the ascetic enjoyed the fruits of his virtue.¹¹⁵

In his *Letters*, Antony addressed an altogether different audience than that of Athanasius, and in a totally different theological framework. From the paradigmatic nature of the biography-genre Antony’s letter signified the introduction of ethical exhortation. Interestingly, the difference between Athanasius and Antony is also the same difference between the Origen of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and the Origen of the *Exhortatio, mutatis mutandis*. Antony was exhorting to ethical vigilance. His vocabulary gave predominance to the notion of *sin*¹¹⁶ and also to the *future hope* --in terms of the *inheritance*. Thus, Antony indicated that the divine assistance was at hand. However, he also exhorted against ethical laxity. Whereas Athanasius viewed ethical life as part of synergism, where human weakness was overcome by the work of the incarnation, Antony directed his attention to the eschatological direction of time. Athanasius’ Antony seems detached from the reality that the ascetics were facing in their daily ethical struggles: for instance, Macarius of Egypt highlighted human weakness indicating the foes that the ascetics were confronting in their spiritual struggles. On the other hand, Antony diminished the role of the incarnation. Thus, his teaching shared the same theological weakness with Origen and –at a later time– Evagrius. Yet, Antony introduced ‘ascetical realism’ in

¹¹⁵ Cf. Origen, *Homiliae in Job* (in catenis), 19 [PG 12, 1032].

¹¹⁶ Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.12.

accepting the possibility of ethical backsliding, and reinforced the meaning of eschatology, placing the latter within the scope of salvation.

3. The ascetical tradition.

i. Causes of divine abandonment.

In the *Lausiatic History*, Abba Paphnutius was asked by Palladius, Evagrius and Albanus about the causes of ethical misfortunes.¹¹⁷ Paphnutius was presented with the lives of five individual ascetics that faced tribulations as part of their lives.¹¹⁸ Though, at this point, Palladius did not provide any further information about the individuals inquiring, details of their ascetical conduct were included in individual chapters of the *Lausiatic History*.¹¹⁹ The stories of Valens, Heron, Ptolemy, Stephen and Eucarpus shared common themes with each other: spiritual struggle, deception by demons --proclaiming their ethical perfection--, confrontation with the ascetical community, and repentance or perdition. Driscoll emphasised the fact that the five monks were “very accomplished” ascetics. Paphnutius was presented with the moral fall of “accomplished” ascetics. His companions did not ask about misfortunes in general terms; their concern was about monks that had slid even after accomplishing spiritual progress.¹²⁰ A story from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* also related the story of a mature ascetic that fell into moral corruption: Antony had lamented the moral fall of this eminent monk –he remained anonymous– whom he called a “great pillar of the Church”.¹²¹ Antony had already noticed the spiritual advancements of the monk. However, he had also anticipated his moral failure.¹²² Driscoll presented the

¹¹⁷ Palladius, *Laus.* 47.

¹¹⁸ Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*, trans. R. T. Meyer, ACW 34 (1964), 47 [reference to vita].

¹¹⁹ See J. Driscoll, ‘Evagrius and Paphnutius on the Causes for Abandonment by God’, *Studia Monastica* 39 (1997), 262-270. In fact, as Driscoll noticed, only three stories were preserved in the Greek text. For the lives of Stephen and Eucarpus, Driscoll referred to Syriac translation of the *Lausiatic History* edited by Draguet. See R. Draguet, *Les Formes Syriaques de la Matière de l' Histoire Lausiaque*, CSCO 169-170 (1978).

¹²⁰ Palladius, *Laus.* 47.5: “τίς ἡ αἰτία τοῦ οὕτω ζῶντας ἀνθρώπους ἐν τῇ ἐρημίᾳ τοὺς μὲν ἀπατηθῆναι τὴν φρένα τοὺς δὲ περιπραγῆναι ἀκολασίᾳ” (why it was that men living in the desert sometimes are deceived in their minds or are wrecked by lust) [trans. Meyer]. Driscoll has translated ἀκολασίᾳ more fittingly as *intemperance*.

¹²¹ *Apophth.* (SysC), 8.1. Antony sent his disciples to the cell of the monk. They found him lamenting and imploring God to be granted ten more days to repent. But death met him only five days after his fall. The story did not clarify if his repentance was accepted by God.

¹²² The incident described in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* shown the continuity between the Antony of the *Apophthegmata* and the Antony of the *Letters*. For it was in his *Letters* that Antony wrote: “[I] want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life, but lack of discernment killed them.... if you neglect yourselves and do not discern your works, then you will fall

case of Guillaumont who questioned the authenticity of Paphnutius' discourse. According to Guillaumont's hypothesis, this chapter of the *Lausiac History* was articulated by Palladius to present Evagrian thought on the causes of divine abandonment. However, Antony's story concerning the fall of the "great pillar" has illustrated that the desert fathers were concerned about the causes of moral backsliding before Evagrius' time. Antony had not inquired about such a cause. However, that the story was included as part of the *Systematic Collection* of desert apophthegms under the title of *pride* indicates that the compiler of the work was concerned about the cause that he identified with *pride*.¹²³ Thus, it is quite absurd to deny the authenticity of a dialogue when its setting was according to the life and experiences of the desert fathers.¹²⁴ More importantly, both Driscoll and Guillaumont did not discern the similarities of Paphnutius' discourse with Nemesius' *De Natura Hominis*. Their intention to argue the authenticity only in terms of the possible Evagrian influences on Palladius made them overlook the stunning parallels between Paphnutius –or Palladius– and Nemesius.

Paphnutius began by providing an introductory discourse on the causes of events in general.¹²⁵ Introducing his ethical teaching, Paphnutius modified the Origenist vocabulary that discerned between events according to the divine *pleasure* (εὐδοκία) and also events according to the divine *consent* (συγχώρησις).¹²⁶ Paphnutius

into the hands of the devil, when you think you are near to God, and that in your expectation of the light, darkness will overtake you". Antony, *Lettrs.* 6 [pg. 23].

¹²³ The title of the chapter in which this story was included is: "Περὶ τοῦ μηδὲν πρὸς ἐπιδειξὶν ποιεῖν". The chapter contains stories that show that vanity and *pride* are spiritual obstacles in the spiritual life. In one of the stories included, Abba Isaiah taught that *pride* was the mother of all sin. Cf. *Apophth.* (SysC), 8.6.

¹²⁴ Driscoll examined Guillaumont's scepticism with regard to the authenticity of the dialogue. He tried to meet the objections of Guillaumont that most probably Palladius had articulated the discourse by making Paphnutius the bearer of Evagrian positions. For Driscoll, the authenticity of Paphnutius was undeniable. See Driscoll, 'Paphnutius', 259ff. See Évagre le Pontique, *Le Gnostique ou a celui qui est devenu digne de la science*, A. and C. Guillaumont (eds.), SC 356 (1989), 141-142 for an extensive footnote concerning Guillaumont's argument.

¹²⁵ Driscoll presented an excellent examination of Paphnutius' discourse in Driscoll, 'Evagrius and Paphnutius on the Causes for Abandonment by God', 259-286. As far as I am aware, this is the only extensive academic work on the subject. Driscoll treated the connection between Paphnutius' discourse and the Evagrian ethical theory. He also provided the most coherent academic work on Evagrius' teaching with regard to the experience of divine abandonment.

¹²⁶ Origen, *Fragmenta in Lucam* (in catenis), 192.18 [pg 309 in GCS 49]: "τῶν γὰρ γινομένων ἃ μὲν κατὰ βούλησιν γίνεται, ἃ δὲ κατ' εὐδοκίαν, ἃ δὲ κατὰ συγχώρησιν" (from the things that happen, some happen according to divine pleasure, others according to consent). See also Suda, *Lexicon*, Γ.271: "τὰ δὲ γινόμενα κατὰ τρεῖς τρόπους γίνεται: κατ' οἰκονομίαν, κατ' εὐδοκίαν, κατὰ συγχώρησιν" (things occur in three ways; according to economy, according to pleasure, according to consent). Damascene, *ExpF.* 43 [pp 100-103]. Driscoll and Guillaumont failed to trace the Origenist foundation of Paphnutius' discourse with regard to this twofold distinction. In focusing on the

dismissed the additional Origenist introduction of events according to the divine *will* (κατὰ βούλησιν). Indeed, Origen had distinguished between events according to God's *will* (κατὰ βούλησιν), his *pleasure* (κατὰ εὐδοκίαν) and his *consent* (κατὰ συγχώρησιν). The distinction between divine *will* and *pleasure* seems to be too obscure to conceive. Paphnutius submerged the two concepts into one, i.e., divine *pleasure*.¹²⁷ In doing so, Paphnutius avoided the implication that the divine *consent* was different from the divine *will*. In addition, for Paphnutius, though all events were subjected to the divine agency, their outcomes were different: some events led to divine glorification whereas others led to divine pedagogy. Thus, from the cause of events, Paphnutius shifted to their outcomes:

Everything that happens which is in accordance with virtue and the glory of God happens by His will. Now, on the other hand, things harmful and dangerous, accidents and falls, these occur with God's consent.¹²⁸

According to this passage, some events led to divine glorification; these were according to the divine *pleasure*. Other events resulted in ethically perilous conditions; these occurred according to divine *assent*. Paphnutius subjected all events to the divine agency. Either due to divine *pleasure* or *consent*, all events in human life originated through God's agency. The main motif behind this argument was the established notion of divine providence:¹²⁹ according to the latter motif, ethical theory was part of the Christian cosmology.¹³⁰ Already, Clement of Alexandria had

Evagrius elements of the discourse, they overlooked any loans from other Patristic sources by Palladius (eg. Nemesius, Didymos). Palladius was alluding to ideas that were quite widespread in the theological literature of late antiquity. See Driscoll, 'Evagrius and Paphnutius'. Also Guillaumont's footnote in Evagrius, *Gnost*, 28.

¹²⁷ Nemesius only addressed the events according to their connection to divine providence (πρόνοια). For Nemesius, providence was defined as the divine *will* (βούλησις). Nemesius, *Natur*. 42 [pg. 125].

¹²⁸ Palladius, *Laus*. 47.5: "[Ὁ]σα τοίνυν γίνεται κατὰ ἀρετὴν εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ, τὰτα γίνεται εὐδοκίᾳ θεοῦ: ὅσα δ' αὖ πάλιν ἐπιζήμια καὶ ἐπικίνδυνα καὶ περιστατικά καὶ ἐκπτωτικά, τὰτα γίνεται κατὰ θεοῦ συγχώρησιν" [trans. Meyer].

¹²⁹ See Clement's criticism of the Epicureans, the Stoics and the Aristotelians. These groups were either disregarding divine providence (Stoics-Epicureans), or they limited divine providence to the celestial realm (Peripatetics). Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*. See also Origen, *Princ*. 2.11.5. Idem, *Contra Celsum*, 7.68ff: Origen distinguished between actions according to divine providence and actions according to divine permission.

¹³⁰ Even Plotinus had argued for the presence of divine providence though, in his system, this notion was obscured due to the depiction of the supreme reality (τὸ Ἐν-the one) as ultimately detached from his emanations in terms of its consciousness: it appears that the Plotinian One was not conscious of the lower material realm. However, Plotinus had not denied that the cosmos was ruled by divine providence. In doing so, he employed the Stoic notion of the Logos as the representative of nous in the material world. As Armstrong remarked, Plotinus argued "the moral order in our world" in terms of theodicy. See A. H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus: An Analytical and Historical Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1940), 102-105. See also, J. M. Rist, 'The One's Knowledge', in *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), 38-52. Also, C.

conceived divine providence as the manifestation of God's creating, ruling and leading power in the creation.¹³¹ Scheffczyk remarked that, for Clement: "[t]he Logos who is the source of the world's being also trains, instructs and redeems mankind; is the providence which leads us to our perfection".¹³² Human history was envisaged in terms of divine pedagogy for the redemption of fallen humanity.¹³³ From the cosmological concept of God as Creator, Clement had introduced the ethical notion of God as provider and redeemer for the human race.

Nemesius of Emesa, an enigmatic figure, also included a discussion on divine abandonment in his *De Natura Hominis* under the theme of divine providence.¹³⁴ Nemesius did not argue in terms of "kinds" of divine abandonment. His intention was to illustrate that divine providence was working through a diversity of manners. Primarily, his argument sought to find the balance between determinism/fatalism (Stoics) and indeterminism (Epicureans) in the light of human 'free agency' (αὐτεξούσιον). According to Nemesius, the diversity of outcomes led one to acknowledge the various ways of divine providence. It also indicated the fact that divine providence corresponded to the individual disposition/needs of the recipients. Thus, Nemesius introduced several biblical figures (e.g. Job and Paul) to highlight this latter position. Nemesius followed Origen's *De Principiis* –not *verbatim* though– to show that divine providence did not interfere (i.e. cancel) with human free agency.¹³⁵ After Origen, Nemesius was the first author to discuss divine abandonment in terms of divine providence. If Young is right about the end of the 4th-century (A.D. 395-400) as the possible composition of the *De Natura*, then it seems that Palladius' source (i.e. Paphnutius or Evagrius) was well acquainted with Nemesius' work.¹³⁶ Palladius composed his work in A.D. 419-420. This date is

Parma, *Pronoia und Providentia: der Vorsehungsbegriff Plotins und Augustins*, Studien zur Problemgeschichte der antiken und mittelalterlichen Philosophie 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

¹³¹ Though this was apparent in the biblical narratives, the language that Clement employed and the fact that he related the role of God's Logos with regard to divine providence, illustrated Clement's dependence on Philo and Plotinus' Neo-Platonism.

¹³² L. Scheffczyk, *Creation and Providence*, trans. R. Strachan, Herder History of Dogma (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 76. The author referred to the lost work of Clement *On Providence* which survives only in fragments.

¹³³ See H. Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis: Studien über Origenes und sein Verhältnis zum Platonismus* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1932). Also: Scheffczyk, *Providence*, 77-80.

¹³⁴ Nemesius, *Natur*. 43 [pg. 134].

¹³⁵ Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.12.

¹³⁶ It is not accidental that Nemesius decided to include Apollinarius in his work, unless he wanted to show his corrupted positions. Apollinarius drew the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities in the 360s. Nemesius indicated that Apollinarius's psychology originated from a distorted understanding of

posterior to Nemesius.¹³⁷ According to Guillaumont, Evagrius was Palladius' source for the articulation of Paphnutius' discourse. However, Evagrius did not favour the term συγχώρησις, as it is the case with Palladius;¹³⁸ nor did the former discussed divine abandonment in the theological context of divine providence. Though Evagrius implied that all God's actions were informed by his providence for the human individual, he did not provide an elaborate argument that was putting abandonment and providence side by side.

For Paphnutius, divine *consent* was informed by a reason (λόγος): "his consent comes about reasonably".¹³⁹ Such affirmation was based on the grounds of Christian reaction against the Gnostic concept that misfortunes were the result of an inadequate or even evil creator. As a reaction to this position, according to Paphnutius, events were the result of the interaction between divine providence and individual human agency. In the desert tradition, Evagrius was the person that underlined the fact that God was not the cause of evils; he was the source of goodness.¹⁴⁰ According to Evagrius, it was only due to divine consent that ethical misfortunes were occurring: "[God] is not the cause of evils, being the fount of goodness, but it is said that he gives as consenting".¹⁴¹ Paphnutius gave more emphasis to the interaction between divine providence and human agency.

For Paphnutius, the "right conduct" (ὀρθός βίος) was antinomical to the "demonic deception" (πλάνη δαιμόνων). What Paphnutius implied was an either-or ethical scheme: the soul had either "right conduct" of life, or she was subject to "demonic deception". The two terms were diametrically opposite. "Demonic deception" occurred due to careless ascetical conduct: it was ethical corruption that

what the relation between the soul and *nous* was. The extreme Arians (Anomoians) had also presented a distorted understanding of this distinction. If Nemesius knew the Apollinarian positions, it is impossible that he was not aware of Arian thought on this matter. Thus, his allusion only to Apollinarius is an indication that he was writing at a time that Christian thought attacked systematically the Apollinarian line of reasoning. Young, 'Nemesius of Emesa', in *Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 159-170.

¹³⁷ See the introduction in Palladius, *Lausiac History* in the edition of ACW 34.

¹³⁸ Evagrius related the two terms only in his Evagrius, *Eccl.* 4 [Ec 1:13 in SC 397].

¹³⁹ Palladius, *Laus.* 47.6: "Ἡ δὲ συγχώρησις ἐκ λόγου γίνεται"

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Nemesius, *Natur.* 42 [pg. 130ff].

¹⁴¹ Evagrius, *Eccl.* 4 [Ec 1:13 in SC 376]: "[οὐ] γάρ ἐστιν αἴτιος κακῶν, πηγή ἀγαθωσύνης ὑπάρχων, πλὴν εἰ μὴ λέγεται διδόναι ὡς συγχωρῶν". Driscoll, 'Paphnutius', 281. Driscoll referred to Géhin's commentary in SC 397 in order to establish the anti-gnostic ambience of this theological position. He observed that "such distinctions become regular *topoi*, particularly in monastic contexts". See Theodoret, *Quaestiones in Deuteronomium*, 37 [PG 80, 440A].

caused the demonic deception. Paphnutius was highlighting human responsibility: ethical events were connected to the conduct of life. Having argued divine providence, Paphnutius turned to the human factor.

The soul's corruption was a result of her *disposition* (πρόθεσις) and her *actions* (πράξις). Origen had clearly suggested that human *disposition* was ethically responsible for sin. In fact, for Origen, the concept was discussed in terms of human consent: no sin was done without the consent of the individual.¹⁴² The theme of human disposition underlined human responsibility (human free agency).¹⁴³

For Paphnutius, even a corrupted *disposition* could result in spiritual progress. For Paphnutius, the soul was capable of spiritual progress without divine assistance. Origen and Athanasius presented spiritual assistance in terms of divine intervention after observing the steps that the soul was undertaking without divine assistance. Paphnutius was following this line of reasoning: the soul could achieve spiritual progress in her own terms without divine assistance. However, this was only at initial stages in the spiritual life.¹⁴⁴

According to Paphnutius, it was the human *disposition* that caused divine abandonment: God was abandoning the soul in order to correct her disposition. For Paphnutius, abandonment was not a sort of punishment: it was correction: "God abandons them for their own good".¹⁴⁵ Thus, Paphnutius introduced the connection between divine *pedagogy* and divine abandonment in his discourse.¹⁴⁶ The notion of pedagogy was still highlighting the divine providence: there was a divine plan behind ethical misfortunes that was leading to the soul's ethical instruction.

The form *ἐγκατάλειψις* was not favoured in the written tradition of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and desert Fathers such as Macarius. In fact, the term

¹⁴² Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.4 and more importantly 3.1.12. Didymos exploited this Origenist position in light of the distinction between *passio* and *propassio*. Though Didymos placed human consent at the centre of his argument, he failed to show the exact "moment" that the individual was held responsible for an action with regard to human consent.

¹⁴³ Theodoret of Cyrrhus noticed that God could have intervened to prevent ethical corruption. However, even though he detested sin, he permitted it due to human free agency. According to Theodoret, God was not violating human free agency. Thus, Theodoret underlined human responsibility with regard to sin in light of divine consent. See Theodoret, *Quæstiones in Deuteronomium*, 37 [PG 80, 440A]. Idem, *Interpretatio in Ezechielis Prophetiam*, 21.17 [PG 81, 1013B].

¹⁴⁴ Even though for the early ascetics spiritual progress was achieved only through divine assistance, they did not deny the fact that the soul was capable of taking initial spiritual terms in her own terms. However, this position was clearly distinguished from spiritual perfection.

¹⁴⁵ Palladius, *Laus.* 47.6: "θεοῦ πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον αὐτῶν ἐγκαταλιμπάνοντος αὐτοῦς".

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Didymos, *In Psalmos 29-34*, 200.17 [Ps 33:17 in PTA 8].

ἐγκατάλειψις appeared only occasionally in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.¹⁴⁷ There is no witness for the use of παραχώρησις in the same genre.¹⁴⁸ The main motifs were that of συγχώρησις and ἐγκατάλειψις. The term συγχώρησις –and its alternative form of παραχώρησις in Macarius– emphasised the notion of divine providence, as opposed to the event of abandonment as such. Clearly, both terms ἐγκατάλειψις-συγχώρησις pointed to the divine consent that was behind ethical trials. Though the term συγχώρησις was in use in terms of *forgiveness* –either from God or men– in the desert tradition, several times it addressed divine consent –so Nemesius of Emesa.¹⁴⁹ The two terms became indistinguishable as was the case in Paphnutius’ discourse. For Evagrius, –in a passage cited earlier– the two terms were in close connection: “God is not the cause of evils, being the fount of goodness, but it is said that he gives [this] by consenting according to the argument of abandonment”.¹⁵⁰ Divine abandonment was a spiritual experience taking place within the context of divine pedagogy. The experience indicated that God was not the creator of evil: God was leaving the soul to experience abandonment because of a cause that originated within the soul.

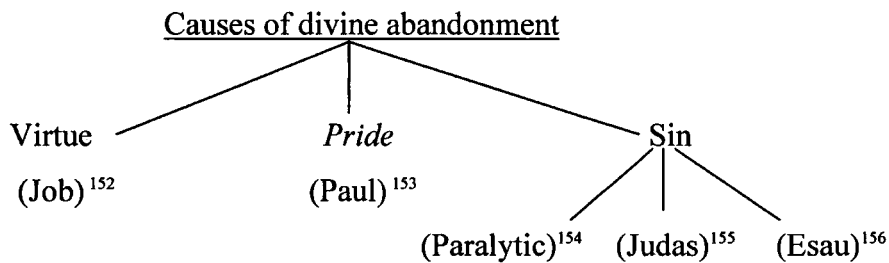
¹⁴⁷ E.g. *Apophth.* (AnC), 20: “καὶ ἔγνω ὁ γέρον ὅτι ἐγκατάλειψις τοῦ θεοῦ ἐγένετο αὐτῷ. Καὶ ῥίψας ἑαυτὸν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ δακρῶν, ἐδέετο περὶ τῆς γενομένης ἐγκαταλείψεως” ((the elder knew that that happened because of divine abandonment. And throwing himself in front of God with tears, he was supplicating about the occurring abandonment). *Apophth.* (SysC), 7.50: “[ἐ]γκατέλιπέ με ὁ Θεὸς καὶ οὐκ ἐπεσκέψατό με” (God abandoned me and he has not visited me).

¹⁴⁸ For Lampe, the earliest use in Patristic literature of παραχώρησις in an ethical context was that of Macarius the Great and Diadochus of Photice. Indeed, according to the *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, there is no indication that the verb had acquired the meaning of divine consent before Macarius. Whereas Lampe cited only Macarius’ witness, he did not include the various forms of the verb παραχωρέω-ῶ in the same author. Hausherr cited only the witness of Diadochus. I. Hausherr, *Les Versions syriaque et arménienne d’Évagre le Pontique: Leur valeur, leur relation, leur utilisation*, Orientalia Christiana 69 (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Suidiorum, 1931), 111. However, before Diadochus, Theodoret of Cyrhus had linked the verb παραχωρέω-ῶ to συγχωρέω-ῶ. Theodoret pinpointed human misfortunes due to divine assertion by employing the verb παραχωρέω-ῶ. Thus, Theodoret had clearly given to the verb the meaning of “giving assertion” in something. Cf. Theodoret, *Quæstiones in Deuteronomium*, 37 [PG 80, 440A]. Idem, *Psalm*, PG 80, 1716C [Ps 104:25]. Idem, *Interpretatio in Ezechielis Prophetiam*, 21.17 [PG 81, 1013B]. It seems that it is not clear if Theodoret first employed the verb in a Christological context or in an ethical frame. Cf. Cyril, *De Sancta Trinitate*, 606.15. Theodoret, *De Incarnatione Domini*, PG 79, 1457.

¹⁴⁹ The desert tradition used the term in a variety of meanings. On some occasions, it appeared as synonymous to forgiveness: “συγχώρησόν μοι, ἀββᾶ, ἡμάρτηκα” (forgive me abba, I have sinned). In others, it meant “to give consent”, i.e. to give way for something to happen: “συγχώρησον αὐτὸν, ἀββᾶ, ἵνα ἔλθῃ καὶ ἴδῃ σε” (forgive me abba, so I could come and see you). See Liddell and Scott (eds.), *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon). Also, G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961).

¹⁵⁰ Evagrius, *Eccl.* 4 [Ec 1:13 in SC 376]: “οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν αἴτιος κακῶν, πηγὴ ἀγαθωσύνης ὑπάρχων, πλὴν εἰ μὴ λέγεται διδόναι ὡς συγχωρῶν κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἐγκαταλείψεως λόγον”.

Despite the fact that Paphnutius highlighted divine providence as the main cause of abandonment, he provided a paragraph discussing the “causes” (αἰτίαι) of divine abandonment. As mentioned earlier, Paphnutius intended to illustrate the role of the human individual in light of the experience of abandonment as divine pedagogy (providence). The ascetic did not provide a clear number of causes. Instead, he provided five biblical images that, according to Paphnutius, had all undergone abandonment.¹⁵¹ The Egyptian elder drew the following connections:



Paphnutius introduced three different causes of abandonment which he did not connect to “kinds” of abandonment.¹⁵⁷ Abandonment was taking place: i) to illustrate hidden virtue; ii) to prevent *pride*; and iii) due to sin. In the latter case, Paphnutius included three different cases (Paralytic, Judas, and Esau). However, if we take into account the initial discussion of Paphnutius that distinguished between events that resulted in: i) divine glorification and ii) ethical peril, then we could include the case of Job and Paul into one group and place the three remaining biblical figures in a second group. As far as I am aware, Origen did not distinguish between the experience of Paul and Job. For Origen, *pride* was the cause of Paul’s trials; and hidden virtue was the cause of Job’s tribulations. However, in the existing evidence, Origen maintained a unified position about the two cases unifying their experience within the scope of divine *paideia*. It seems that Origen did not distinguish between the two biblical figures since he discussed the motif of their trials in terms of divine

¹⁵¹ Burton-Christie commented on the use of scriptural images by ascetics to demonstrate asceticism as the application of the scriptural *word* in praxis. D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

¹⁵² Job 40:8.

¹⁵³ 2 Cor 12:7.

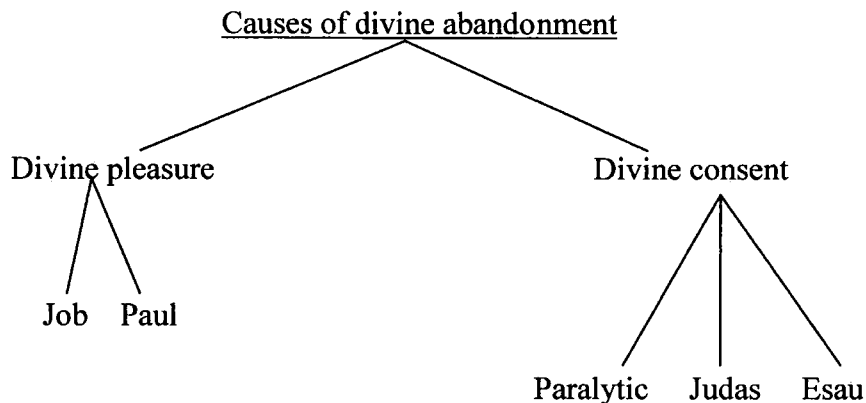
¹⁵⁴ Jn 5:14.

¹⁵⁵ Mt 27:5.

¹⁵⁶ Gn 25:29.

¹⁵⁷ Guillaumont discerned only two causes: i) for the manifestation of hidden virtue; and ii) for avoiding *pride*. Evagrius, *Gnost.* 28 [pg 137 in SC 356].

testing. Taking this latter point into consideration, Paphnutius' scheme could be refined as follows:



The first time in Patristic literature that biblical images (Job-Paul-blind man¹⁵⁸) were identified in terms of “causes” of abandonment was in Nemesius. The distinction between *causes* that lead to divine glorification or destruction originated in Origen.¹⁵⁹ Arguing in terms of free-agency, Origen’s intention was to show that God was testing his devotee: it was the human disposition that was tested and was leading to virtue or destruction.¹⁶⁰ Paphnutius seems to have combined Nemesius’ biblical images and the Origenist discourse on free agency. What distinguished between the two Paphnutian groups was the presence of sin. In the case of Job and Paul, God illustrated the hidden virtue and prevented the presence of sin (i.e. *pride*) respectively. The presence of sin was limited to the second group: sin had caused their abandonment by God. Paphnutius highlighted the presence of sin by introducing three different biblical examples. Whereas the first group experienced divine pedagogy, the second group was subjected to divine correction.¹⁶¹ Paphnutius did not copy Nemesius’ biblical exemplars *verbatim*. His selection of biblical images corresponded with the lives of the three fallen monks: Valens and Eucarpus resembled the paralytic; they were “redeemed” (ἀπεθεράπευσαν) from sin.¹⁶² Heron’s

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Jn 9:1.

¹⁵⁹ Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.12.

¹⁶⁰ For Origen, divine providence did not overlap with human free agency. The one motif did not limit the other. According to Origen, God provided for everyone equally. But the human individual responded according to his/her individual disposition.

¹⁶¹ The inclusion of Judas introduced the possibility of perdition.

¹⁶² Palladius, *Laus.* 25.5. Driscoll reluctantly supported the authenticity of the stories. Driscoll, ‘Paphnutius’, 263. Palladius’ reference to medical terms such as “ἀπεθεράπευσαν”, “οἴημα” (similar sound and form with “οἶδημα”), and “ιάματα” supports the stylistic dependence of Palladius on Evagrius. It was Evagrius that had treated divine abandonment in medical terms: “μᾶλλον δὲ τὴν δυσίατον γὰγραιναν ὁ ἱατρὸς τῶν ψυχῶν δι’ ἐγκαταλείψεως θεραπεύει” (this difficult-to-heal

life was reminiscent of Esau; he lived an ambiguous life between corruption and repentance.¹⁶³ Finally, Stephen remained unrepentant like Judas;¹⁶⁴ he was caught up in a burning house together with his concubine.¹⁶⁵ Nemesius had included the case of the blind-man of the Gospel, but Paphnutius introduced the exemplar of the paralytic. Significantly, in the Gospel narratives, Christ exhorted the paralytic to sin no more. In the case of the blind-man, Christ indicated that the blindness of that individual was not caused by sin.

The position of distinguishing between causes according to the presence --or not-- of sin was advocated by Diadochus of Photice. The bishop of Photice included a brief discussion about the causes of divine abandonment in his century of *Kephalaia Gnostica*.¹⁶⁶ Diadochus looked at the reason that humanity was subject to demonic afflictions even after the coming of divine grace. It is not clear which was Diadochus' source. Diadochus' discussion shared common themes with the Paphnutian discourse. However, if we take into account the suggested connection between Diadochus and Macarius,¹⁶⁷ then it is more likely that Diadochus actually worked on an established motif that he might have known through the work of Macarius. Indeed, Macarius presented a reduction on Paphnutius' original discourse in his *Spiritual Homilies*.¹⁶⁸ Diadochus paraphrased his Macarian witness, maintaining its basic meaning.

To put Diadochus' work and ascetical thought within context, according to des Places' examination of the historical background, the *Gnostic Century* of the bishop of Old Epirus was an anti-Messalian polemic. Though he did not deny the anti-Messalian character of the work,¹⁶⁹ Plested argued that Diadochus presented a

gangrene, the physician of souls heals it through abandonment). Cf. Evagrius, *Cogitat.* 10 [PG 79, 1212]. For the life of Eucarpus see Draguet, *Histoire Lausiaque*, 73.

¹⁶³ Palladius, *Laus.* 26.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Origen, *Commentarium Series in Evangelium Mattheum*, 312 [pg 245ff in GCS 38.2].

¹⁶⁵ Draguet, *Histoire Lausiaque*, 72. For both Stephen and Judas death was the result of their ethical corruption

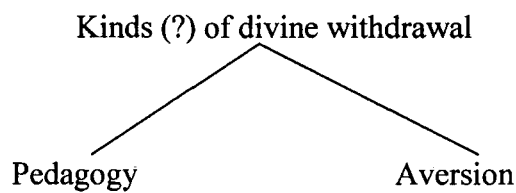
¹⁶⁶ Diadoque de Photice, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, Éd. des Places (ed.), SC 5 (1955).

¹⁶⁷ Plested indicated Dörr's and Places' position that Diadochus was an exponent of Evagrian thought. He indicated that Dörr's and Desprez progressively acknowledged the importance of Macarius' influence on Diadochus. For Plested, Diadochus was more indebted to the Macarian legacy than it had been thought in the past. See M. Plested, 'Diadocus of Photice', in *Macarian Legacy*, 134. See also the introduction of Places in Diadoque de Photice, *Oeuvres Spirituelles*. F. Dörr, *Diadochus von Photike und die Messalianer: Ein Kampf zwischen Wahrer und Falscher mystik im Fünften Jahrhundert*, Freiburger Theologische Studien, 47 (Münch: Herder & Co, 1937). H. Dörr, *Wort und Stunde*, vol. 1 (Gottingen: 1966). V. Desprez and M. Canévet, 'Pseudo-Macaire (Syméon)', *DSp* 10, 20-42.

¹⁶⁸ Macarius, *Serm.* 54.

¹⁶⁹ Diadoque de Photice, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, 12ff.

synthesis of Evagrian and Macarian elements. In fact, for Plested, Diadochus introduced an ascetical theory within the theological framework of “reformed Messalianism” of the Macarian corpus.¹⁷⁰ Diadochus was critical of his sources, i.e. Macarius and Evagrius. Macarius had maintained a potential co-existence of grace and sin. Diadochus introduced the theme of divine *withdrawal* (παραχώρησις) –a term peculiar to Macarian thought– to highlight the efficacy of baptism, and also affirm the observed ethical corruption of ascetics (realism).¹⁷¹ For Diadochus, there were two “kinds” –Diadochus did not designate them as such– of divine *withdrawal* (παραχώρησις) that resulted in ethical trials:¹⁷²



For Diadochus, God was withdrawing his presence from the soul: i) to test the soul (παιδευτική); ii) due to aversion (ἀποστροφή).¹⁷³ At a first glance, Diadochus did not address “causes” of divine abandonment. His vocabulary was not that of the Paphnutian discourse. Yet, Diadochus maintained the original distinction between events without adopting Paphnutius’ language *verbatim*.¹⁷⁴ Notwithstanding Diadochus’ twofold distinction of “kinds” of *withdrawal*, that he chose the Macarian *παραχώρησις* over the Paphnutian *ἐγκατάλειψις* indicates that Diadochus was emphasising the notion of divine providence in his discourse.

¹⁷⁰ Plested, *Macarian Legacy*, 134 and 256.

¹⁷¹ Plested, ‘Diadochus of Photice’, in *Macarian Legacy*. 134ff.

¹⁷² The line between “kinds” and “causes” was obscure in the ascetical literature of late antiquity. Though Diadochus seemed to introduce two different “kinds” of abandonment, with distinct ethical characters, within context, Diadochus was actually discussing “causes” that have resulted in the diminishing of the divine presence in the soul and the presence of the demonic powers: the one “cause” focused on the divine action, whereas the other highlighted human accountability.

¹⁷³ Diadochus, *Keph.* 86-87 [references according to chapters]. See Diadoque de Photice, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, 46-48. M. J. Buckley ‘Discernement of Spirits’, in M. Downey (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical, 1993), 274-281. Éd. des Places, ‘Diadoque de Photice’, in *DSp* 3, 829. G. Bardy, ‘Discernement des esprits’, in *DSp* 3, 1253.

¹⁷⁴ John Damascene followed Diadochus’ edition of Paphnutius’ discourse. As it was the case with Paphnutius and Maximus, John Damascene included a discussion concerning the causes of divine abandonment and a discussion concerning the distinction of ethical events. In this latter discussion, he has freely adapted Diadochus of Photice. See Damascene, *ExpF.* 43 [pp 100-102]. Evagrius, *Gnost.* 28 [pg 137 in SC 356]. Cf. Diadochus, *Keph.* 69 and 87.

Hausherr indicated that Diadochus' vocabulary was alternating between the motifs of *παραχώρησις* and *ἐγκατάλειψις*. According to Hausherr, the two terms were synonymous in Diadochus' thought.¹⁷⁵ However, Hausherr did not notice the Macarian origins of this position.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, whereas Paphnutius was distinguishing ethical events according to divine *pleasure* and *consent*, Macarius substituted the latter term with *withdrawal* (*παραχώρησις*), a term peculiar to Macarius. The term defined ethical events that were occurring due to divine consent. Diadochus followed this Macarian edition of ethical distinction of events. Nevertheless, Diadochus remained critical of his source. In the Macarian corpus, *παραχώρησις* was always connected to *testing* (*δοκιμασία*) or *paideia*.¹⁷⁷ *Ἐγκατάλειψις* connoted divine *aversion* due to sin. Thus, Macarius distinguished between the two terms with respect to the presence of sin: the former term emphasised the role of God (pedagogy), whereas the latter motif highlighted the human ethical responsibility. God withdrew from his devotee, but abandoned the sinner. However, in Macarius, this distinction never took a dramatic form.

Macarius was working in an anti-Messalian ambience arguing the presence of sin within the soul in terms of human free-will. For Macarius, there was a natural incompatibility between grace and sin –already underlined in Pauline theology and clarified in Origen-. Thus, for Macarius, the distinction between divine *withdrawal* and *abandonment* introduced the distinction between divine pedagogy and divine chastisement: that is to say that, Macarius was responding to the objection that grace seemed to be insufficient to keep the demonic powers away from the soul. Macarius intended to show that this is so for two reasons: on the one hand, God instructed the soul at an ethical level; on the other hand, the human individual remained responsible for ethical corruption. Thus, Macarius wanted to show the importance of ethical vigilance: in any case, God was abandoning his devotee. However, Macarius distinguished between divine pedagogy and human accountability. Thus, rather than two different “kinds” or “causes” of abandonment, the Macarian discourse

¹⁷⁵ Hausherr, *Les Versions*, 111. Cf. Diadochus, *Keph.* 69 and 87.

¹⁷⁶ According to Hausherr, Diadochus treated the two terms as synonymous: *withdrawal* was emphasising the notion of divine *assertion* and the theme of *gnosis* that resulted from spiritual *experience* (*πείρα*). However, Hausherr overlooked the Macarian origin of the term. Hausherr, *Les Versions*, 111. Hausherr drew parallel lines between Diadochus' thought and Evagrian theology, overlooking the Macarian influence on Diadochus.

¹⁷⁷ Usually both terms were included in a sentence that illustrates purpose (*iva...*).

pinpointed divine intervention (παραχώρησις) and human ethical accountability (ἐγκατάλειψις).¹⁷⁸ Diadochus exploited this elegant ethical distinction. Yet, by placing both conditions under the same term, i.e. *withdrawal*, Diadochus exemplified that both cases were actually parts of the divine pedagogy. Thus, Diadochus reinforced Paphnutius' argument concerning ethical events as part of divine providence.¹⁷⁹

As it was mentioned, according to the Paphnutian distinction, the ethical events that were according to divine *pleasure* led to divine *glorification*, and those events according to divine *consent* resulted in *ethical peril* (ἐκπτώτικα). Diadochus substituted the term *ἐκπτώτικα* with *ἀποστροφή* (aversion) which was favoured in the Macarian corpus as highlighting human accountability.¹⁸⁰ It was noticed that the term had originated in the Old Testament –God's turning away his face– and was treated as synonymous to divine abandonment. Didymos had indicated that divine *aversion* was part of the divine pedagogy: the soul that had remained sinful experienced divine aversion in order to correct her ethical corruption.¹⁸¹ For Didymos, the soul was

¹⁷⁸ Evagrius, *Prov.* 120 [Pr 10:18 in SC 340]. Athanasius followed the Origenist position concerning the pre-lapsarian condition of humanity in contemplation of the divine. For Athanasius, such contemplation was undisturbed and nothing external could be mingled with it. However, the fall resulted in the estrangement of the soul from her own nature. As Anatolios noticed, “the soul's turning from God is simultaneously an estrangement from itself, a going ‘outside itself’ which is the opposite of the ecstatic vision of God”. Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 188.

¹⁷⁹ In placing human free agency at the centre of his ethical theory, Diadochus denied that divine *abandonment* had left the soul completely separated from God. See Diadochus, 86. The grammatical subject of the verb “to hand into” was obscured by Diadochus intentionally. Diadochus restrained from making God the obvious subject of his sentence. It was the sentence –“κατ’ ἀποστροφήν παραχώρησις”– that was the actual subject. This fact reflects Diadochus' argument that it was human free agency that had abandoned God in the first place: “ψυχή μή θέλουσα ἔχειν τὸν θεόν” (the soul that does not want to have God). The negative participle μή θέλουσα pointed out the soul's free agency (αὐτεξουσίη) as the factor that decided about her ethical condition.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Origen, *Fragmenta in Psalmos*, 76.1: “Ἐγὼ κἀν προσέχη μοι ὁ Θεός, διὰ τὴν ἐν ἐμοὶ ἄνοιαν οὐκ αἰσθάνομαι ὅτι προσέσχε μοι ὁ Θεός· ὁ δὲ ἤδη διαβεβηκῶς καὶ προκόπτων, οὐκ ἀναισθητεῖ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ προσοχῆς, ἢ τῆς ἀποστροφῆς· διὸ νῦν μὲν λέγει ὅτι προσέσχε μοι. Ἐτέρωθι δὲ ἵνα τί τὸ πρόσωπόν σου ἀποστρέφεις ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ; εἴαν ποτε αἰσθηθεῖς ἀπεστραμμένον αὐτοῦ, ἢ διὰ πειρασμοῦ, ἢ ὀπωσθήποτε τοῦ Θεοῦ” (Me, even if God is attentive to me, due to the foolishness that is in me, I cannot feel that God is attentive to me: for he that has advanced and progressed is not insensitive about the divine attention, or about his aversion: so that now he says he is attentive to me. In another place: why do you turn your face from me? You might feel that he is turned away, either through temptation or anything [sent] of God). Didymos, *In Psalmos 20-21*, 20.6 [Ps 20:8 in PTA 7] and 49.7 [Ps 21:25 in PTA 7]. It is more likely that Diadochus found this term in Macarius. In the latter, the motif appeared in the context of divine *aversion* due to sin. Evagrius did not use the term within this present context. Macarius, *Serm.* 16.4.6.

¹⁸¹ Didymos, *In Psalmos 29-34*, 200.17 [Ps 33:17 in PTA 8]: “τὸ ἀποστρέψαι τὸ πρόσωπον οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν ποιούντων τὰ κακὰ λέγει, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐχόντων αὐτὸ φαινόμενον. ὀλίγον δὲ ταραχθέντες ἔδοξαν ἔξω τοῦ προσώπου γίνεσθαι· διὸ καὶ ἐταράχθησαν. αἰσθησὶν ἔλαβον ὅτι βῆρηκαί τι αὐτοῖς ἀηδές. γέγονεν δὲ ἡ ἀποστροφή τοῦ προσώπου ὡς πρὸς τὸ διεγεῖραι ἐκείνους τοὺς πρότερον αὐτὸ ὀρώντας καὶ μὴ ἀπεστραμμένον ἔχοντας, ἵνα τύχωσιν αὐτοῦ. ἐπὶ τοὺς ποιούντας δὲ κακὰ οὐδ’ αὐτῆ ἡ αἰτία, ἀλλ’ ἴν’ αἰσθηθῶσιν ὅτι προνοία θεοῦ κατεδικάσθησαν, προνοία θεοῦ

corrected, but not punished by God. She was tested in order to conceive her ethical corruption. Thus, for Diadochus, both *pedagogy* and *aversion* were parts of divine pedagogy: through them, the soul was approaching God:

We should approach God by knowing the experience of both withdrawals according to the proper manner of each condition.¹⁸²

Édouard des Places provided an alternative translation:

It is that we know the experience of both conditions to approach God (pour aller à Dieu) with the disposition that fits each of these.¹⁸³

Whereas Places' edition emphasises the need to acquire experience of divine withdrawal, it is more likely that Diadochus focused on the actual result of the experience. For Diadochus, both experiences led to God even though they had different features and intensities.¹⁸⁴

Thus, Paphnutius, Macarius and Diadochus did not actually distinguish between various "kinds" of abandonment. Their intention was to show the ethical role of sin. Whereas divine pedagogy took the form of *testing* in the case of Job and Paul, the presence of sin turned the reader's attention to human ethical responsibility: divine pedagogy corrected and redeemed human ethical corruption.

According to the bishop of Old Epirus, either because of sin or due to divine pedagogy, the soul was subject to divine *withdrawal*. What underpinned his

ἐν τοῖς ἀνιαροῖς εἰσιν. καὶ γίνεται γε καὶ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τέλει χρηστῶ" (he has said that [God] turns away his face not from those that do evil, but from them that have it as an accident. For they are shaken for a while and think that they are away from his face. They have conceived that there was something disgusting in them. In this case, he turned away his face to stir up those that were previously looking at him without him being turned away [from them], so that they could have him. But, it is not the same cause for those that they do evil; but so that they could feel that they were condemned to distress due to divine providence. Utterly, this becomes a benefit). Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.12.

¹⁸² Diadochus, *Keph.* 87: "δεῖ οὖν ἡμᾶς εἰδότας τὴν πείραν τῶν ἀμφοτέρων παραχωρήσεων κατὰ τὸν ἐκάστης τρόπον προσιέναι τῷ θεῷ".

¹⁸³ "Il faut donc que nous connaissions l'expérience des deux désolations pour aller à Dieu avec les dispositions qui conviennent à chacune d'elles". French translation in Diadoque de Photice, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, 147.

¹⁸⁴ We need to remind the Greek text: "δεῖ οὖν ἡμᾶς εἰδότας τὴν πείραν τῶν ἀμφοτέρων παραχωρήσεων κατὰ τὸν ἐκάστης τρόπον προσιέναι τῷ θεῷ". Places translation left the infinitive προσιέναι without syntactical dependence while the participle εἰδότας was a predicate to δεῖ. I think that it is the infinitive προσιέναι that depends on the verb δεῖ. Thus, the participle εἰδότας has become a predicate of the infinitive showing the manner in which something takes place. For Places, the soul needed to have knowledge of both the experiences to approach God ('pour aller à Dieu').

discourse was the notion of *gnosis* that was the outcome of divine pedagogy.¹⁸⁵ Thus, Diadochus narrowed the ethical role of sin indicating that, overall, ascetical life was subject to divine pedagogy. Diadochus employed the moderate Macarian Messalianism critically, but he also maintained distinct Evagrian elements by means of the connection between the motion from *praktike* to *gnosis*. For Diadochus, spiritual life included the knowledge (*gnosis*) of both the divine and the demonic. According to Diadochus, this was the only way for soul to exercise her natural free agency. The term *gnosis* had been witnessed by both Evagrius and Macarius who linked it to the multifaceted motif concerning spiritual *experience* (πέιρα).¹⁸⁶ Diadochus shed more light on the theme by arguing that the experience of *withdrawal* resulted in the soul's *gnosis* of the true nature of the divine and sin.¹⁸⁷ The motif of *gnosis* as the ultimate purpose of divine pedagogy was not peculiar to Diadochus, but characterised an era that witnessed the conflict between and also the mingling of Gnostic and Christian ideas. However, according to Daniélou, behind Diadochus' argument was the notion of divine pedagogy as leading the soul to redemption.¹⁸⁸ Diadochus related divine *gnosis* to both the divine and the demonic. In doing this, Diadochus was following Evagrius' argument. However, Diadochus employed *gnosis* in an ethical context that denied an exclusively intellectual conception of union with God. He avoided extreme intellectualism by exploiting the Evagrian position that true *gnosis* of sin directed the soul to *hatred* of sin: "Those combating should pursue to hate all the irrational desires, so that they shall have

¹⁸⁵ Diadochus, *Keph.* 69: "φωτισμοῦ καὶ ἐγκαταλείψεως τὸ μέσον πείρα" (experience is the middle of illumination and abandonment). Evagrius, *Gnost.* 28: "πέιρα δὲ τῆς ἐγκαταλείψεως ἔγγονος" (experience is the progeny of abandonment). See also Hausherr, *Les Versions*, 111.

¹⁸⁶ Evagrius, *Ad Eulogium*, 23 [PG 79, 1124-1125]. Evagrius, *Gnost.* 28. Evagrius related the ethical experience to the *gnostic* life. Macarius, *Serm.* 2.10.4 [all references in TLG]. Plested, *Macarian Legacy*, 155.

¹⁸⁷ Diadochus, *Keph.* 6 and 77. The ascetical literature did not treat the knowledge of good and evil as such. More emphasis was given to the discernment of the works of good and evil, which it was designated as the "*discernment of the spirits*". However, for Diadochus, only the *Gnostikos* had discerned between the works of good and evil. See Diadoche de Photicé, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, 42ff. Also Places, 'Diadoque', 829. Buckley, 'Discernement', 274-281. Bardy, 'Discernement', 1247-1254. It also needs to be noticed that Evagrius and Diadochus shared with each other the terms *gnosis* and *Gnostikos* –both terms had been employed by Clement: Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 118-226-. Though Macarius had witnessed the former, he never referred to the latter term. The fact that Diadochus composed a spiritual century on the life of *gnostiké* with direct reference to both terms was a direct witness to his Evagrian dependence.

¹⁸⁸ Already Clement and Origen had drawn the theological lines to connect the life of *gnostiké* to divine pedagogy. See Daniélou, Origen, 278.

hatred against them as their habit".¹⁸⁹ This *hatred* was not an intellectual achievement. It resulted from the soul's experience of both the divine grace and the bitterness of sin. For Diadochus, the soul was undergoing alternating periods of divine presence and withdrawal as a sort of comparison between the *sweetness* of grace and the *bitterness* of sin.¹⁹⁰

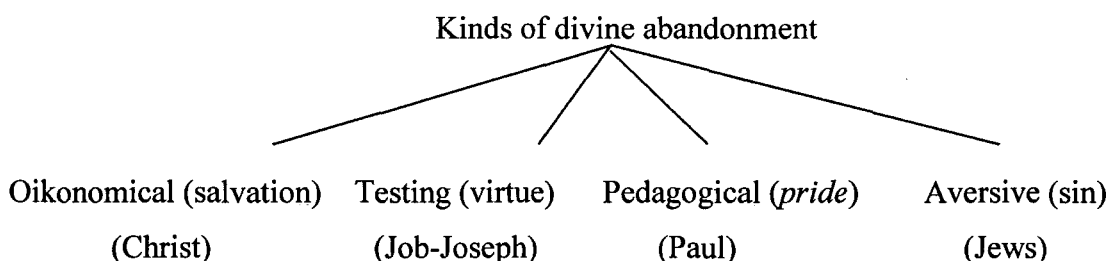
Paphnutius put the lives of the ascetics into perspective by indicating that their ethical backsliding was caused by sin. For Paphnutius, this sin was understood in terms of *pride*. As made clear, Origen and Antony underlined the presence of *pride* as a spiritual foe. For Antony, the soul remained subject to *pride* which he illustrated as part of the human nature. Indeed, the literature of early desert Christianity was permeated with the notion of *pride* as the mother of sins. Paphnutius clarified that it was *pride* hiding behind the ethical backsliding of the three monks. Hence, according to Driscoll, Paphnutius introduced the connection between virtue, *pride* and ethical backsliding. In Evagrian ethical theory, *pride* was the subtlest of passions that sprang from virtue. Indeed, Evagrius, listed *pride* at the top of his list of vices. *Pride* was the last passion threatening the soul's spiritual progress. But, unlike any other vice, *pride* resulted from this progress. In her ethical journey, the soul was puffed up and thus fell back to the life of vice. Paphnutius indicated that Paul avoided being puffed up through experiencing ethical trials. Palladius' *Lausiac History* was meant to be read as an ascetical discourse. The introduction of Paphnutius' discourse exhorted to spiritual vigilance and warned against ethical laxity. Indeed, Paphnutius' discourse

¹⁸⁹ Diadochus, *Keph.* 43 and 71: "Πάσας μὲν τὰς ἀλόγους ἐπιθυμίας οὕτω δεῖ μελετᾶν μισεῖν τοὺς ἀγωνιζομένους, ὥστε εἰς ἕξιν τὸ πρὸς αὐτὰς μῖσος κησασθαι". Cf. Evagrius, *Cogitat.* 10 [PG 70, 1212]: "πάνυ τὸ μῖσος τὸ κατὰ τῶν δαιμόνων ἡμῖν πρὸς σωτηρίαν συμβάλλεται, καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐργασίαν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐστὶν ἐπιτήδειον: ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἐκτρέφειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, ὥσπερ τι γέννημα ἀγαθὸν οὐκ ἰσχύομεν, τῶν φιληδόνων πνευμάτων διαφθειρόντων αὐτὸ, καὶ πρὸς φιλίαν, καὶ συνήθειαν πάλιν τὴν ψυχὴν ἐκκαλομένων: ἀλλὰ ταύτην τὴν φιλίαν, μᾶλλον δὲ τὴν δυσίατον γάγραϊναν ὁ ἰατρός τῶν ψυχῶν δι' ἐγκαταλείψεως θεραπεύει: συγχωρεῖ γάρ τι φοβερόν παθεῖν ἡμᾶς ὑπ' αὐτῶν νύκτωρ ἢ μεθ' ἡμέραν, καὶ πάλιν ἡ ψυχὴ πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον μῖσος ἐπανατρέχει διδασκομένη πρὸς τὸν Κύριον λέγειν, κατὰ τὸν Δαβὶδ, τὸ, "Τέλειον μῖσος ἐμίσουν αὐτοῦς, εἰς ἐχθροὺς ἐγένοντό μοι." Οὗτος γὰρ τέλειον μῖσος μισεῖ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς, ὁ μῆτε κατ' ἐνέργειαν, μῆτε κατὰ διάνοιαν ἀμαρτάνων: ὅπερ τῆς πρώτης, καὶ τῆς μεγίστης ἐστὶν ἀπαθείας τεκμήριον" (hatred against the demons helps us to salvation, and it is proper for working on the virtues; but to breed it inside us as a good progeny is not possible, for the pleasure-loving spirits corrupt it, and they call the soul back to friendship and an [evil] habit. But this sort of friendship, to put it better, this difficult-to-heal gangrene, the physician of souls heals through abandonment; he gives consent to suffer something terrible by them [demons] during the night or day, and again the soul runs back to the original hatred instructed to say to the Lord, according to David: 'I have hated them with perfect hatred, they were counted my enemies'. This is the way that the person that sins neither in deeds nor in thoughts hates the enemies with perfect hatred; this is the proof of the first and greatest apatheia). Cf. Ps 138: 22.

¹⁹⁰ Diadochus, *Keph.* 6 and 86 and also 30 and 76.

introduced the motif of human frailty by indicating the presence of *pride* within the ascetical soul. Paphnutius exaggerated the presence of sin in order to warn his fellow ascetics. In an even more dramatic manner, Macarius was diminishing the efficacy of divine grace in his sincere eagerness to awaken spiritual vigilance among his fellow ascetics. Paphnutius' discourse was shaped within an ascetical milieu where the shifting from the efficacy of divine grace (e.g. *Vita Antonii*) to the predominance of human frailty (Macarian corpus) was at work.

In his work, Maximus the Confessor also addressed the notion of divine *abandonment*. In general terms, Maximus maintained the basic structure of Paphnutius' scheme. However, it seems more probable that Maximus had two sources: Nemesius and Evagrius. Maximus introduced his own modifications in shaping his ethical theory.¹⁹¹ Maximus addressed the "kinds" (εἶδη) of abandonment thus:



Maximus discussed divine abandonment in terms of *economy* (Christ), *testing* (Job), *pedagogy* (Paul) and *aversion* (Jews). Overall, Maximus followed the distinction between divine *pedagogy* and divine *aversion*. However, Maximus seems to have followed the Evagrian and Diadochean shifting point from *causes* to *kinds* of abandonment.¹⁹² Whereas, Paphnutius examined the "causes" of abandonment, Evagrius and Diadochus indicated the "kinds" of divine abandonment. However, at least in Diadochus' case, the difference seems to be only in terms of vocabulary since Diadochus was actually following the Paphnutian position of highlighting divine pedagogy as corresponding to individual needs. This position was not made clear in the apophthegmatic form of Evagrius' *Gnostikos*. Indeed, Maximus retained the notion of divine providence as his focusing point. Despite the fact that Maximus distinguished between different "kinds" of abandonment, in his closing lines, he gave up the implicit distinction between *pedagogy* and *aversion* indicating that all the

¹⁹¹ Maximus, *Charit.* 4.96 [PG 90, 1072].

¹⁹² Cf. Evagrius, *Gnost.* 28. Diadochus, *Keph.* 86-87.

various forms of divine abandonment were filled with divine wisdom and led to salvation.¹⁹³

That Maximus favoured the term *abandonment* over *withdrawal* advocates the position that Maximus was working on Nemesius/Paphnutius and Evagrius, not Macarius or Diadochus.¹⁹⁴ Maximus borrowed the main structure from Nemesius, especially in terms of the connection between divine abandonment and biblical exemplars. In Evagrius, he found the idea of enumerating the “kinds” of divine abandonment. Nevertheless, Maximus modified the Nemesian/Paphnutian and Evagrian teaching according to his needs. It seems that, from the obscure Nemesian discourse concerning providence, Maximus drew the motif of abandonment in the light of divine providence. The enumeration of “kinds” of abandonment was of Evagrian origin. However, Evagrius had introduced five “kinds”, whereas Maximus reckoned only four “kinds”.

That Maximus was working on Nemesius rather than Paphnutius is evident from the inclusion of Christ’s abandonment on the cross. Nemesius was the first author of late antiquity to include Christ’s abandonment among other “kinds” of divine abandonment.¹⁹⁵ In doing so, Nemesius intended to show that the incarnation was part of divine providence: through the incarnation, God brought salvation to humanity: the incarnation was another expression of divine providence. Nemesius’ objective was not to argue the similarity or dissimilarity between Christ’s abandonment on the cross and the abandonment of his devotee. That is to say that Nemesius did not introduce a parallel experience between Christ and the faithful soul. Nemesius did not understand abandonment as a Christ-like experience. Once more, we need to observe that Nemesius only showed Christ’s abandonment as part of divine providence which illustrated that, through all distinct experiences, God was redeeming humanity. It cannot be supported that Nemesius introduced a parallel discussion between Christ and the faithful soul: the second part of the thesis illustrated the obscurity that surrounded the term “abandonment” when it was applied

¹⁹³ Maximus, *Charit.* 4.96 [PG 90, 1072]: “Σωτήριοι δὲ οἱ πάντες τρόποι ὑπάρχουσι καὶ τῆς θείας ἀγαθότητος καὶ σοφίας ἀνάμεστοι”.

¹⁹⁴ For the Macarian influence on Maximus see Plested, ‘Maximus the Confessor’, in *Macarian Legacy*, 213-254. According to Plested, Maximus knew the work of Macarius and was working on Macarian themes either directly from him or through the ascetical medium of Mark the Monk and Diadochus of Photice.

¹⁹⁵ When Nemesius referred to “kinds”, his intention was to show the various ways in which divine providence was working in human affairs without necessarily introducing distinct forms of experiences.

to Christ's case. To argue the parallel introduction of Christ and the soul in Nemesius as evidence of the Christ-like character of the ascetical abandonment implies that Nemesius had a clear definition of the nature and the mechanism of abandonment in Christ. But this was not the case.

What linked Maximus' discourse to Nemesius was the presence of the participle "δοκούσης" (seeming) as a predicate of Christ's abandonment. As far as I am aware, such a combination was not common in late antiquity. Didymos was the only exception.¹⁹⁶ And even in his case, Didymos did not provide a clear definition of what abandonment meant. For him, the main point was that those who were truly condemned were the by-standers that mocked Christ.¹⁹⁷ I could not think of another possible source for Maximus with respect to the inclusion of *oikonomical* abandonment in his list that was predicated as "seeming". Nemesius, and partially Didymos, are the only sources.¹⁹⁸ Didymos was the only author to distinguish between the "seeming" abandonment of Christ and the "aversive" abandonment of the Jews. However, it was Nemesius that offered a sort of list of various biblical figures with regard to divine abandonment.¹⁹⁹

However, one could locate an obscure introduction of Christ's abandonment in Evagrius' *Gnostikos*. Such an interpretation depends completely on differing translations from the Syriac text; a fact that has casted doubts on the reliability of the Syriac text and the actual reading of the original Greek text.²⁰⁰ Evagrius referred to the "causes" –or "kinds" according to Frankenberg– of divine abandonment without enumerating them in his *Gnostikos*.²⁰¹ Here, we will present the Greek retro-version

¹⁹⁶Didymos, *In Psalms 20-21*, 25.14-18 [Ps 21:2 in PTA 7]: "επει τοινυν εις σταυρον εληλυθεν ο(σ)ωθ(η)ρ, δοκει δ(ε) τοις ανθρωποις ενκαταλειψις εινα ιταυτο υποπεισειν τοιουτου θανατου... ενκατελειφθη ο(σ)ωθ(η)ρ, και εαυτου ενκαταλειψιν λεγει, επει κεφαλη ηναυτω" (for the Saviour has come to the cross, it seems to men that it is abandonment to be subjected to such death... these people have been abandoned. And it says that it is his own abandonment because he was their head).

¹⁹⁷ It seems that, for Didymos, the Jews represented corrupted humanity.

¹⁹⁸ Nemesius concluded that "εγκαταλείπεται τις προς καιρόν εις διόρθωσιν άλλου, ίνα τ(ο) κατ' αυτον σκοπούντες οι άλλοι παιδεύωνται". Cf. Origen, *Fragmenta in Psalms 1-150*, 36:25: "εγκαταλείπονται οι δίκαιοι προς καιρόν δοκιμής χάριν".

¹⁹⁹ There is no evidence in Morani's edition of the *De Natura Hominis* that Nemesius was familiar with Didymos' work.

²⁰⁰ See D. A. Ousley, *Evagrius' Theology of Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (PhD Thesis: University of Chicago, 1979), 31. Ousley observed that the works surviving only in Syriac need to be treated with caution since it is more likely that they reflect both Evagrian teaching and also the Syriac ambience in which they were translated.

²⁰¹ Driscoll presented an excellent analysis of the present chapter from *Gnostikos*, examining it within the context of the Evagrian ascetical tradition. He indicated its place within the Evagrian thought and also the broader genre of desert literature. Driscoll, 'Evagrius and Paphnutius on the Causes of Abandonment'.

from the surviving Syriac provided by Frankenberg and the French translation of the Syriac by Guillaumont. In both cases, it is the punctuation that alters the meaning of the sentences. Despite the fact that many chapters of the *Gnostikos* have survived in the original Greek, the chapter that discussed divine abandonment has been transmitted only in Syriac. Frankenberg's retro-version was an attempt to restore the Greek original of the *Gnostikos*.

Μνημόνευε τα πέντε τῆς δοκιμασίας εἶδη, ἵνα ἔχῃς ὀρθῶσαι τοὺς ὀλιγοψύχους καὶ τοὺς λύπη ἐκλυομένους. ἡ δὲ κρυπτή ἀρετὴ διὰ δοκιμασίας ἀποκαλύπτεται καὶ ἡ ἀμελουμένη διὰ καταδίκης μετανέρχεται καὶ γίνεταί αἰτία ζωῆς τοῖς ἄλλοις· καὶ εἰ ἡ πρακτικὴ μετὰ τῆς γνώσεως συνυπάρχει, τοὺς αὐτὴν κεκτημένους διδάσκει ταπεινοφροσύνην. μισεῖ γὰρ τὴν κακίαν ὁ αὐτῆς πείραν λαβὼν, ἡ δὲ πείρα ἐκγονοῦ ἐστὶ δοκιμασία, ἡ δὲ δοκιμασία, θυγάτηρ τῆς ἀπαθείας.²⁰²

Guillaumont's French translation of the Syriac is as follows:

Souviens toi des cinq causes de la dérélition,²⁰³ pour que tu puisses relever les pusillanimes abattus par l'affliction. En effet la dérélition révèle la vertu qui est cachée. Quand celle-ci a été négligée, elle la rétablit par le châtement. Et elle devient cause de salut pour d'autres. Et quand la vertu est devenue prééminente, elle enseigne l'humilité à ceux qui l'ont en partage. En effet, il hait le mal, celui qui a fait l'expérience; or l'expérience est un rejeton de la dérélition, et cette dérélition est fille de l'impassibilité.²⁰⁴

Driscoll observed that the surviving Syriac and its translations are obscure: "it is not easy to know for sure exactly where in the text to place the numbers that divide what he is speaking about".²⁰⁵ For Driscoll, even though Evagrius referred to "five causes/kinds", it is not clear which ones he had in mind. Things become further confusing if we take into account Hausherr's translation from the Syriac, in his remarkable work on the Syriac and Armenian manuscript tradition of the *Gnostikos*.

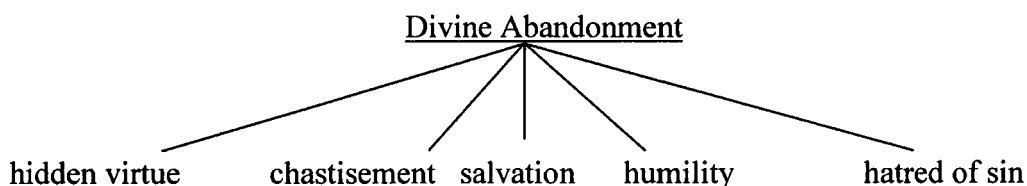
²⁰² The text of Frankenberg was cited by Hausherr in idem, *Les Versions*, 110.

²⁰³ Frankenberg maintained the notion of *testing* (δοκιμασία). Though the term was witnessed in the manuscript tradition, Guillaumont advocated the presence of *abandonment* in the text, primarily in terms of its remarkable witness by both the Syriac and also Greek manuscript tradition of the text. See Evagrius, *Le Gnostique*, 135-136. In fact, in order to support his position, Guillaumont included Maximus' use of the word *abandonment* in the *Capita de Caritatae*. Thus, he implied Maximus' direct dependence on the Evagrian text. So did Hausherr in Idem, *Les Versions*, 110-111. They both overlooked Maximus direct dependence on Nemesius.

²⁰⁴ Evagrius, *Gnost.* 28: "Remember the five causes of abandonment so that you can raise up again the weak souls brought down by this affliction. In fact, abandonment reveals hidden virtue. When virtue has been neglected, it re-establishes it through chastisement. And it becomes the cause of salvation for others. When virtue has reached a high degree, it teaches humility to those who have shared in it. Indeed, the one who has had an experience of evil, hates it; for, experience is a flower of abandonment, and such abandonment is the child of passionlessness" [trans. Driscoll]. See Driscoll, 'Paphnutius', 277.

²⁰⁵ Driscoll followed the translation and punctuation of Guillaumont. See Driscoll, 'Paphnutius', 277. His statement would have made more sense if he had in mind the text of Frankenberg and Hausherr. Guillaumont was consistent about his punctuation. In his extensive footnote --in the Evagrius, *Le Gnostique*, 28-- Guillaumont, whom Driscoll followed, clearly pointed out the five kinds of abandonment.

But first, we need to note that, according to Frankenberg’s retro-version, for Evagrius, divine abandonment resulted in ethical chastisement and communicated a certain quality to others. This quality was the “cause for life” (αἰτία ζωῆς) according to Frankenberg. But, Hausherr and Guillaumont translated it as “cause de salut” (cause of salvation). At this point, for reasons of convenience, we could accept that *cause of life* and *cause of salvation* are practically synonymous. Frankenberg and Hausherr --on the one hand--, and Guillaumont --on the other hand-- disagreed about the syntactical dependence of the sentence “cause of salvation”: for them, the phrase depended on the sentence concerning ethical chastisement. For Guillaumont, it was an independent sentence. Frankenberg and Hausherr introduced one period including the motifs of chastisement and salvation: “καὶ ἡ ἀμελουμένη διὰ καταδίκης μετανέρχεται καὶ γίνεται αἰτία ζωῆς τοῖς ἄλλοις” (Frankenberg);²⁰⁶ “la [vertu] bralante est restaurée grace à la condamnation [qui l’atteint], et devient cause de salut pour les autres” (Hausherr).²⁰⁷ Guillaumont separated the two sentences: “quand celle-ci a été négligée, elle la rétablit par le châtement. Et elle devient cause de salut pour d’autres”. If we follow Guillaumont’s punctuation,²⁰⁸ then according to him, Evagrius included the following “causes” of divine abandonment:



Any attempt to examine Frankenberg’s translation whilst maintaining his original punctuation²⁰⁹ is bound to fail. His text is even more impenetrable than Driscoll maintained about Guillaumont’s translation. His punctuation is quite uncertain. Hausherr spotted Frankenberg’s weakness in the last sentences that referred to the acquisition of “πειρα”, and the following connection between divine

²⁰⁶ In Hausherr, *Les Versions*, 110.

²⁰⁷ Hausherr, *ibid*, 113. Hausherr used semicolons to distinguish between the five causes. Thus, the comma between the two sentences showed their inter-dependence.

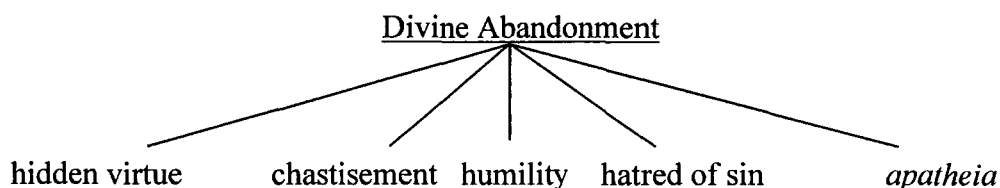
²⁰⁸ Guillaumont used five full-stops in order to indicate the length of the sentences and thus point out the five causes of divine abandonment. See also footnote no. 28 in Evagrius, *Le Gnostique*, 135ff.

²⁰⁹ Frankenberg used all sorts of punctuation that have obscured the meaning of the text. It is also probable that the Syriac text was following the obscurity of the Greek original that lacked punctuation, or it was transmitted with confusing punctuation. Hausherr and Guillaumont introduced further sources to shed more light on the passage, such as Diadochus and Maximus. Their punctuation was dictated by their interpretation of what other sources might have revealed the true meaning of the *Gnostikos*.

abandonment and *impassibility*. For Frankenberg, the sentence concerning the “salvation of others” was part of divine chastisement. It seems that Guillaumont took the sentence referring to divine impassibility as predicating the sentence addressing the connection between divine *abandonment* and “πεῖρα”. However, Hausherr separated the two sentences:

[c]elui-là hait le mal qui en a fait l'expérience, or l'expérience est un fruit de la déréliction; et <il y a même> une déréliction <qui> est fille de l'apatheia.

It needs to be noticed that, the three scholars devised their punctuation in order to maintain the number “five” that Evagrius introduced in his opening lines. What could be extracted from Hausherr’s examination on chapter 28 of the *Gnostikos* is the following scheme:



In his effort to discern the five causes --maintaining Evagrius’ initial reckoning-- while clarifying the distinction between *hatred of sin* and *apatheia*, Hausherr abolished the notion of divine abandonment as an individual cause of the salvation of others.²¹⁰ As it was mentioned, for this scholar, the sentence was part of the notion of divine chastisement. The reason why Hausherr came up with the above scheme depended entirely on his attempt to discern behind the Evagrian text the Origenist distinction of spiritual life into three stages: *praktiké*, *physiké* and *theologia*.²¹¹ Indeed, Hausherr anticipated his methodology by indicating that Maximus designated the four causes of abandonment as “salutary” (σωτήριοι).²¹² Noticing the lack of any reference to *apatheia* from Maximus’ side, Hausherr suggested that Maximus excluded the notion of abandonment as resulting in *apatheia* for the reason that it was not a true *salutary* cause. According to Hausherr, Maximus approached the

²¹⁰ Driscoll did not comment on this fact. Due to the fact that he examined the Evagrian position only with respect to Paphnutius’ teaching, he only focused on the notion of divine abandonment as chastisement and testing. Though, in fact, Driscoll addressed all the causes of divine abandonment – including *apatheia*- of the *Gnostikos*, he left out the concept of *abandonment* as the “cause of salvation for others”. See Driscoll, ‘Paphnutius’.

²¹¹ For a brief examination of the three stages of the spiritual life see Louth, *Origins*, 102ff.

²¹² Maximus, *Charit.* 4.96 [PG 90, 1072].

notion of *apatheia*, in this instance, as an echo of the Origenist notion of the eschatological restoration of beings (ἀποκατάστασις).²¹³ However, Hausherr has overestimated Maximus' dependence on Evagrius at this instance. Maximus did not use the term *apatheia* which he did not find in Nemesius/Paphnutius discussion of divine abandonment.

Nevertheless, it is worth following Hausherr's thought. According to him, the two first causes (chastisement-virtue) were related to the initial steps of spiritual life that established virtue within the soul. The next two causes (humility-hatred) were connected to the fight of the monks against *pride* at a more mature spiritual stage. The last cause, i.e. "the fruit of *apatheia*", was related to knowledge. Hausherr referred to Maximus to clarify the last point. According to Hausherr, Maximus had related the last cause of abandonment to knowledge of both the human "weakness" (ἀσθένεια) and the "divine power" (δύναμις).²¹⁴ Hausherr attempted to present Evagrian thought as a coherent system: the threefold distinction of the spiritual life was a motif that was permeating the Evagrian ascetical corpus.²¹⁵ Even though his discussion on the subject seems to justify his interpretation, we could not ignore that Evagrius was not consistent in his use of the term *apatheia*. *Apatheia* in the *Gnostikos* might have implied the final *apokatastasis* of humanity in terms of perfection. However, in the *De Oratone*, the third part of chapter 37 addressed *apatheia* in terms of the soul's ethical struggle against *temptations*. Thus, Evagrius did not always connect *apatheia* to the eschatological restoration of humanity. The term had both i) an ethical and ii) an eschatological meaning.

From the above discussion, it is evident that only Guillaumont's translation supports the position that Evagrius actually discerned the theme of "salvation of others" as a "cause" of divine abandonment. In his extensive footnote in the edition

²¹³ Hausherr, *Les Versions*, 111-112.

²¹⁴ Cf. Evagrius, *De Octo*, 18 [PG 79, 1164]: "Μέγα ἄνθρωπος βοηθούμενος παρὰ Θεοῦ: ἐγκατελείφθη, καὶ τὸ ἀσθενὲς ἐπέγνω τῆς φύσεως. Οὐδὲν ἔχεις, ὃ μὴ παρὰ Θεοῦ ἔλαβες" (a man was greatly helped by God; he was abandoned and conceived the weakness of nature). Maximus, *Charit.* 2.67 [PG 90, 1005]. Though Hausherr pointed out Maximus' dependence on Evagrius, he overlooked the fact that Maximus could have found the theme of *gnosis* as resulting from divine withdrawal in Diadochus of Photice. See Louth, 'The Sources of Maximus' Theology', in *Maximus the Confessor*, 25ff.

²¹⁵ According to Hausherr, in the *Ad Monachos*, Evagrius introduced the motif of abandonment in the light of the three stages of the spiritual life. Driscoll followed Hausherr and brought into play the *De Oratone* as a potential cross-reference for Hausherr's position. Evagrius, *AdMon.* 62. Idem, *Orat.* 37 [PG 79, 1176]. See Hausherr, *Les Leçons*, 55. J. Driscoll, *The 'Ad Monachos' of Evagrius Ponticus: Its Structure and a Select Commentary*, *Studia Anselmiana* 104 (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1991), 234.

of *Le Gnostique*, Guillaumont provided some further insights:²¹⁶ what attracted Guillaumont's attention were John Damascene's *Expositio Fidei*, and the fragments in Nicetas' exegetical *catena* on *Matthew* that were attributed to John.²¹⁷ Alongside divine aversion and pedagogy, John added the experience of abandonment "πρὸς διόρθωσιν ἄλλου" relating the example of Lazarus,²¹⁸ the blind-man and, the martyrs.²¹⁹ But, in his *Expositio Fidei*, John included a final introduction: "So that, from the action that seems to be absurd, a great and wonderful thing might be achieved, as, through the cross the salvation of the mankind."²²⁰ Noticeably, John maintained the images of Lazarus, the blind-man and the martyrs. Thus, in his *Expositio Fidei* John added the case of Christ. However, John was copying *verbatim* from Nemesius, leaving outside whatever he thought as superfluous. It is not accidental that John included his discussion on abandonment within the scope of divine providence, like Nemesius. Thus, even in John's case, there was no reference to real "kinds" of abandonment in terms of enumerating them. Though John had also followed Diadochus' distinction between two "kinds" of divine abandonment, he only did that in order to show the various ways that divine providence was following.²²¹

Maximus included another scheme, in his *Capita de Caritatae*, that underlined his clear dependence on Evagrius this time. It is significant that, in this instance, Maximus dismissed any allusion to biblical images. He overlooked the motif of the "salvation of others". Maximus also maintained the number "five" that had been introduced by Evagrius' *Gnostikos*. However, Maximus did not address the causes or kinds of abandonment (ἐγκατάλειψις). He referred to divine withdrawal (παραχώρησις), and introduced the causes that resulted in demonic attacks.²²²

Maximus shared all his points with Evagrius, but one.

²¹⁶ Evagrius, *Le Gnostique*, 137. In any case, it was not Guillaumont's intention to argue Maximus' source. Driscoll avoided discussing the only concept that Guillaumont did not examine any further in the *Gnostikos*. Driscoll, 'Paphnutius'.

²¹⁷ Damascene, *Fragments in Matthaëum* (in *catena Nicetae*), PG 96, 1412.

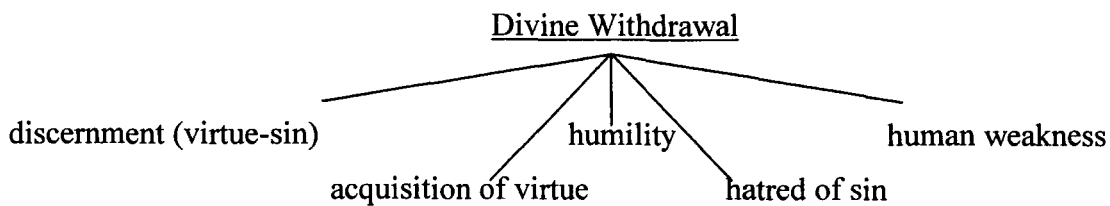
²¹⁸ Lk 16:19-31.

²¹⁹ Jn 9:3.

²²⁰ Damascene, *ExpF.* 43 [pg 101]: "[I]να διὰ τῆς πράξεως τῆς δοκούσης ἀτόπου μέγα τι καὶ θαυμαστὸν κατορθωθῆ ὡς διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ τὴν σωτηρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων".

²²¹ Damascene, *ExpF.* 43 [pg 101]: "Τῆς δὲ ἐγκαταλείψεως εἰσὶν εἶδη δύο: ἔστι γὰρ ἐγκατάλειψις οἰκονομικὴ καὶ παιδευτικὴ καὶ ἔστιν ἐγκατάλειψις τελεία ἀπογνωστικῆ" (there are two kinds of abandonment; there is "oikonomical" and educational abandonment, and there is abandonment of total despair).

²²² Maximus, *Charit.* 2.67 [PG 90, 1005].



According to Hausherr's examination of the *Gnostikos*, the Maximian scheme depended entirely on Evagrius.²²³ However, Maximus did not "copy-paste" from his source uncritically. He edited his own linguistic applications. What is striking is the absence of the motif concerning the "cause of salvation of others". Either Maximus did not discern this motif within the Evagrian text, or he deliberately removed it from his own scheme. In this scheme, Maximus introduced the presence of demonic afflictions. Thus, according to the latter hypothesis, he eliminated the case of "salvation of others". It seems that Maximus treated the motif in close connection to Christ's abandonment on the cross. Thus, he preferred to leave the motif outside, counting it unfitting to include it in a chapter that related *withdrawal* to demonic afflictions.

Maximus treated the Nemesian and Evagrian texts as unsystematic sources that had introduced the motif of divine abandonment. He used the Nemesian and Evagrian components according to his own needs. As it was mentioned, Maximus could not have discerned the notion of providence in Evagrius' *Gnostikos*. It was only in Nemesius that Maximus found this theme. Indeed, in his second scheme that depended on Evagrius, Maximus addressed the causes of demonic afflictions without highlighting the theme of divine providence. Maximus might have discerned the motif of the "salvation of others" in Evagrius. However, it is certain that he found it in Nemesius. There is no evidence that Nemesius was acquainted with Evagrius' thought. It seems that the introduction of Christ's abandonment belongs entirely to the theological genius of Nemesius. If Guillaumont got his translation right, then Evagrius had obscurely deliberated on this theme, observing that the abandonment of one person could be the cause of salvation.²²⁴

²²³ Hausherr, *Les Versions*, 111. Evagrius, *Le Gnostique*, 136.

²²⁴ John Damascene used Nemesius' scheme. The introduction of the distinction between *παιδευτική* and *ἀπογνωστική ἐγκατάλειψις* indicates that he was also aware of the Diadochean ethical thought: divine *aversion* led to despair. Kotter did not refer to Diadochus' work in the critical apparatus of the *Expositio Fidei*.

As has been noticed, another point of departure that Maximus introduced to the Nemesian/Paphnutian teaching was the inclusion of the Jews.²²⁵ Paphnutius emphasised the presence of sin and its results for the spiritual life. Nemesius had overlooked this factor. Maximus stressed the notion of divine pedagogy. Thus, he limited any references to the presence of sin as a potential cause of divine abandonment. However, he did include the notion of divine *aversion* in the biblical figure of the Jews. It seems that Maximus was well aware of both the Nemesian and the Paphnutian discourse. However, it was in the latter that Maximus discerned the notion of divine *aversion* in terms of divine pedagogy. Paphnutius included a triple allusion to sin including the biblical images of Judas, Esau and the paralytic. Maximus limited the presence of sin as a spiritual factor by employing three examples of divine pedagogy instead (Paul, Job and Joseph). The notion of divine *aversion* was limited to the image of the Jews. The inclusion of the term *aversion* (κατ' ἀποστροφήν) suggests that Maximus was familiar with the Diadochean introduction of this motif in the ascetical literature. We need to exclude a potential Macarian dependance since the connection between aversion and pedagogy in Macarius was very obscure. Maximus had intended to introduce the image of the Jews in terms of their biblical depiction: they were abandoned by God in the desert, wandering and fighting against many nations. Thus, Maximus implied the presence of sin. After the exegetical work of Origen, especially on the book of *Numbers* the wandering Jews were linked to the spiritual journey of the soul that was advancing through trials and temptations. In this sense, this biblical image was not similar to the Paphnutian inclusion of Judas. Maximus smoothed the motif of divine *aversion* by saturating his discourse with the theme of divine *pedagogy*. The Jews were tested in the desert as they were led by God to the Promised Land. Unlike Paphnutius that duplicated the images related to sin, Maximus extended the notion of divine pedagogy.

ii. Perfection and sin.

When looking at the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, it is evident that the genre introduced images that addressed the state of spiritual perfection: at this stage,

²²⁵ Maximus, *Charit.* 4.96 [PG 90, 1072].

Macarius was an interlocutor with demons,²²⁶ while obedient monks raised the dead.²²⁷ In fact, at this stage, all sorts of miraculous incidents occurred, whilst monks transformed their “black-skinned” self into an angelic countenance.²²⁸ Clearly, these were the works of ascetical perfection. It was observed that, Athanasius presented Antony as enjoying the fruits of perfection in this present life. There is no doubt that the influential work of Athanasius was part of a broader tradition founded on a Christocentric model of ascetical life that highlighted the value of the incarnation. It is in this context that, for Amma Sarah, victory over passions was established on Christ’s defeat of the passions in his flesh.²²⁹ According to the life of Abba Pachon,²³⁰ he was redeemed from the spirit of fornication only through Christ’s intervention. This spirit had afflicted him for more than 12 years. However, his passion subdued only through the intervention of Christ who “was crucified for us”.²³¹ These last words communicated the message that spiritual perfection resulted from Christ’s victory over passions in the incarnation.²³² The fleeing demons of the *Apophthegmata* echo Antony’s victory over them in the *Vita Antonii*: the demons were not dreaded by the monks any more. In fact, it was the demons that were mocked by the Christian ascetics.²³³ Above all, victory over demons was the work of humility.²³⁴ The monk that had achieved humility was liberated from the passions. He was feared by the demons who did not dare to approach him. Hence, behind the works of perfection, the desert ascetics had discerned the works of humility. To borrow from Keller, humility was making “Christ tangible”: the acquisition of humility linked the monks

²²⁶ *Apophth. (AC)*, Macarius.3; Theodore of Ferme, 27.

²²⁷ *Apophth. (AnC)*, 294. See Benedicta Ward, ‘A Sense of Wonder: Miracles of the Desert’, in N. Russell (ed.), *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Ægypto* (London: Mowbray, 1980), 39-46.

²²⁸ *Apophth. (AC)*, Paul the Simple.1. For an examination of the notion of blackness of skin as part of the ascetical anthropology and demonology see Brakke, ‘Ethiopian Demons: the Monastic Self and the Diabolical Order’, in *Demons and the Monk*, 157-181.

²²⁹ *Apophth. (AC)*, Sarah, 2. Ramfos pointed out the dimensional relation between creation and the incarnation. According to Ramfos, creation is the outcome of divine freedom; miracles need to be viewed in terms of this freedom that remains unbound to the need for a scientific explanation. The incarnation is the ultimate extension of the working of divine freedom within creation. What links creation and the incarnation, in fact, is the manifestation of divine love as an extension of freedom. S. Ramfos, ‘Wonders and Visions’, in *Like a Pelican in the Wilderness: Reflections on the Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. N. Russell (Brookline MA: Holy Cross, 2000), 237ff.

²³⁰ *Apophth. (SysC)*, 5.54.

²³¹ Cf. *Apophth. (AC)*, Elias.7; Moses.1; 18. *Apophth. (SysC)* 5.52.

²³² Burton-Christie, *The Word*, 245. The author discerned the work of humility behind the closing lines which he believes that they were a short comment from Abba Elias.

²³³ *Apophth. (AC)*, Theodore of Ferme, 27.

²³⁴ *Apophth. (AC)*, Anthony, 7; Theodora, 6: “[κ]αὶ ἔλεγον ὅτι οὐδὲν ἡμᾶς νικᾷ, εἰ μὴ ταπεινοφροσύνη” (and [the demons] said: nothing defeats us, only the humility). The same story also in *ibid*, Macarius, 11. *Apophth. (AnC)*, 307.

to Christ. It was Christ's humility that was featured in the ascetic deeds through their humility.²³⁵ Humility was the beginning and the end of virtue²³⁶ and, according to Amma Theodora, the only way to salvation.²³⁷ Abbas such as Ammonas, Arsenius or Poemen were depicted in terms of spiritual perfection.²³⁸ Their humility was well attested and tested.²³⁹ The *Apophthegmata* included short ethical exhortations that concluded: "do this and you will be saved".²⁴⁰ What this exhortation meant was that the elder instructing had followed the above exhortation and had been saved.²⁴¹ In Antony's case, an angel had instructed him to alternate between times of prayer and work to fight back *acedia*. According to the story, Antony accomplished what he had been instructed, and "doing thus he was saved".²⁴²

But, this was only half the story. The "God-bearer" Antony had also grieved over the ethical fall of the "great pillar of the Church".²⁴³ Before the ethical fall of this ascetic who "had performed a miracle on the road", Antony had pointed to his spiritual progress. He had also expressed his scepticism about his spiritual future, as if anticipating his fall. His fear was realised within a few days. In this same tradition that highlighted the ascetic's ethical frailty belong sayings and stories of ascetics that dreaded the time of death. For instance, the judgement that followed death was a consideration that had been sojourning with Abba Arsenius until his last breath.²⁴⁴ It

²³⁵ *Apophth. (AC)*, Daniel, 3: "Ἔθος ἐστὶ τῆ ὑπερηφανία τοῦ διαβόλου, πίπτειν ἀπὸ τῆς ταπεινώσεως τῆς ἐντολῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ" (this is how the *pride* of devil is brought low, through the humility of the commandment of Christ) [trans. Ward]; *ibid*, Arsenius, 33: "[ο]ὐκ ἐταπεινώθησαν τοῦ διορθώσασθαι ἑαυτοῦς, καὶ πορευθῆναι τῆ ταπεινῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ: διὸ καὶ μένουσιν ἔξω τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ=" (they do not humble themselves so as to correct themselves and walk in the humble way of Christ) [trans. Ward]. *Apophth. (AnC)*, 373: "[Ἐ]χε τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦτ' ἐστὶ τὴν ταπεινωσιν" (have the seal of Christ, that is the humility). See Burton-Christie, 'The Humble Way of Christ', in *The Word*, 236-260. Also, D. G. R. Keller, 'Humility: Making Christ Tangible', in *Oasis of Wisdom: The World of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Collegeville MI: Liturgical, 2005), 131-155. Also: Ramfos, 'Humility: Withdrawal from Being', in *Pelican in the Wilderness*, 183-195.

²³⁶ In B. Ward (ed.), *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (London: Mowbray, 1981), John of the Cells, 2 and Syncletica, 26.

²³⁷ *Apophth. (AC)*, John Colobos, 22.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, Ammona, 11; Arsenius, 30; Bessarion, 4; Joseph, 7; Poemen, 144; Silouan, 3. Ramfos, 'Wonders and Visions', in *Pelican in the Wilderness*, 235ff.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, Peter the Pionite 3; Poemen, 4; The Roman Abba, 2 [for Ward, undoubtedly, this Roman Abba is Abba Arsenius]. *Apophthegmata Patrum, (AnCol)*, 43. Ramfos and Burton-Christie juxtaposed the works of humility to "false-humility" which, according to the desert fathers, was a demonic devise. See Burton-Christie, *The Word*, 241. Ramfos, *Pelican in the Wilderness*, 185.

²⁴⁰ *Apophth. (AC)*, Anthony, 3; Arsenius, 1. Biare, 1; Joseph, 4; Macarius, 41. *Apophth. (SysC)* 1.1 and 5.53.

²⁴¹ *Apophthegmata Patrum, (AC)*, Agathon, 4; Cassian, 4; Silouan, 6.

²⁴² *Ibid*, Anthony, 1: "[κ]αὶ οὕτως ποιῶν ἐσώζετο".

²⁴³ *Ibid*, Anthony, 14.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, Arsenius, 40.

is remarkable that an accomplished ascetic, such as Sisoës was, would ask for more time in order to repent.²⁴⁵ The notion of ethical backsliding was an integral part of the ascetical literature of late antiquity. This warning anticipated a potential ethical fall in the life of the ascetics which puts under question the degree to which we need to understand perfection as a victory already won by the faithful soul.

The desert literature introduced the theological tension of arguing the spiritual life in terms of perfection and also potential backsliding. Whereas the ascetics had presented ascetical life in terms of the victory over passions as resulting from the incarnation, they also illustrated this present life as conducted by spiritual trials. For Amma Theodora, the accomplished ascetics had defeated the demons. Nevertheless, she also indicated that, in fact, trials are featured at all stages of spiritual life until one's last breath:

[L]et us strive to enter the narrow gate. Just as the trees, if they have not stood before the winters and the storms cannot bear fruit; so it is with us, this present age is a winter; and if we don't [strive] through many trials and temptations, we cannot become heirs of the kingdom of heaven.²⁴⁶

This passage echoed the Origenist connection between winter and the future rewards in the *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*.²⁴⁷ According to Amma Theodora, this present life featured the winter of trials. The distinction between the present life ("winter") and the life to come ("kingdom of heavens") gave to her exhortation an eschatological flavour: perfection was a condition yet to come. Another female ascetic, Amma Syncletica, employed the image of Paul to conclude that, even at the stage of spiritual perfection, demons waged war against the soul.²⁴⁸ The "God-bearer" Antony had assured Abba Poemen that the latter needed to expect temptations until his last breath. He also pointed out the impossibility of entering the divine joy without ethical trials. For Antony, it was only within trials that God manifested his glory: "Whoever has not experienced temptations cannot enter into the kingdom of heavens. He said, (you) take away the temptations and no-one is saved".²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, Sisoës, 14.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, Theodora, 2: "Ἀγωνίασθε εἰσελθεῖν διὰ τῆς στενῆς πύλης. Ὅν τρόπον γάρ τὰ δένδρα, εἰ μὴ λάβωσι χειμῶνας καὶ βετοῦς, καρποφορεῖν οὐ δύνανται: οὕτως καὶ ἡμῖν, ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος χειμῶν ἐστί: καὶ εἰ μὴ διὰ πολλῶν θλίψεων καὶ πειρασμῶν, οὐ δυνησόμεθα τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν γενέσθαι κληρονόμοι" [trans. Ward].

²⁴⁷ Origen, *Martyr*. 31-32.

²⁴⁸ *Apophth. (AC)*, Syncletica, 7.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid (AC)*, Antony, 4-5. The translation by Ward "without temptations no-one can be saved" expresses in a free style the meaning of Antony's words. The closing sentence was iterated *verbatim* by Evagrius according to the same alphabetical collection. Cf. *Ibid*, Evagrius, 5.

For the ascetics, spiritual progress was informed by the divine *paideia*: spiritual warfare was the ideal way to ethical ascension. Thus, perfection was a promise that remained unfulfilled in this life. The ascetics communicated this position through the introduction of ethical trials even at a mature spiritual stage. Unlike Athanasius' Antony who was victorious over the passions, for Amma Syncletica, spiritual progress and ethical life were coterminous factors: the higher the progress, the more intense the trial. At this point, it needs to be noticed, in advance, that the scheme (the higher... the higher) was an integral ascetical theory of Macarius and Evagrius.²⁵⁰ Spiritual progress was conceived in connection to the intensity of ethical trials. According to the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Abba Pachon experienced *pedagogical* abandonment: "God has left me alone".²⁵¹ What is of interest for us is the fact that Abba Pachon described his experience in terms of despair and even blasphemy. If we follow Diadochus' distinction between *pedagogy* and *aversion*, in strict terms, then it is evident that Pachon experienced abandonment due to his ethical corruption. For, in Diadochus, despair and blasphemy were part of divine withdrawal according to aversion. However, God revealed to Pachon that he was only tested: it was not sin that caused divine abandonment: Pachon did not suffer ethical corruption. According to this account, the experience of divine abandonment, even at a mature spiritual level, was a dreadful event. Only God's intervention held Pachon from despairing.

The desert fathers presented the theological tension between perfection and spiritual struggles unsystematically. The two positions were not juxtaposed. They were integrated into an ascetical system that discerned the works of divine pedagogy at all levels of spiritual life. In fact, it is also the case that the ascetics identified divine presence with trials: "[A]n elder was afflicted and sick continuously. It happened that for a year he was not tried and was grieving and crying saying: God has abandoned me and has not visited me".²⁵² The elder felt desolated due to the fact that divine pedagogy had abandoned him. It is not the case that the ascetic had reached ethical *apatheia*. The lack of trials was a sign of divine *abandonment*. The ascetic acknowledged the profit that divine *pedagogy* had for the spiritual life. It was noticed that Clement had envisaged spiritual life in terms of divine instruction.

²⁵⁰ Evagrius, *Prakt.* 59.

²⁵¹ *Apophth.* (SysC), 5.54: "ἀπέστη μου ὁ Θεός".

²⁵² *Apophth.* (AnC), 2.209: "Γέρων τις ἦν καὶ συνεχῶς ἐκακοῦτο καὶ ἡσθένει. Συνέβη δὲ αὐτὸν ἕνα ἐνιαυτὸν μὴ κακωθῆναι, καὶ ἐδυσφόρει δεινῶς καὶ ἔκλαιε, λέγων: Ἐγκατέλιπέ με ὁ θεός καὶ οὐκ ἐπεσκέψατό με".

Origen had emphasised the value of the “narrow gate”. And, for the Christian ascetics, spiritual stillness was the deprivation of divine pedagogy:

Abba Poemen said of Abba John the Dwarf that he had prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: ‘I find myself in peace, without an enemy’, he said. The old man said to him, ‘Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the afflictions and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress’. So he besought God and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, ‘Lord, give me strength for the fight’.²⁵³

Notwithstanding that Abba John had reached the ideal of ethical “tranquillity” (ἀμεριμνία), an elder introduced the notion of spiritual warfare as a great ideal. The elder discerned the work of *pride* behind abba John’s words. Thus, he instructed him to beseech divine pedagogy in order to be established to his previous humility. The elder implied a connection between ethical tranquillity and the presence of *pride*.

The fact that Abba John needed to return to his previous humility highlighted the link between spiritual progress and ethical laxity (*pride*). To illustrate this connection, Abba Orsisius drew the analogy between the soul and a lit lamp:²⁵⁴ the Holy Spirit withdrew from the soul when *negligence* had taken over the soul; like a lamp without oil that was put out. At times that the soul was stripped of divine assistance (Holy Spirit), the demons attacked her like mice devouring the unlit wick, and breaking the vessel. The fire was protecting this vessel a few moments ago. Abba Orsisius’ intention was to warn against spiritual laxity. According to him, the soul that was acquainted with divine presence was not ethically secured. As opposed to Athanasius’ biography of Antony, the ascetic that Abba Orsisius had addressed remained subject to potential spiritual foes unless he remained ethically vigilant: the soul could “put off” divine presence because of her spiritual *negligence*. Such *negligence* sprang up within the human nature. And it resulted *in* demonic presence - as opposed to resulting *from* demonic presence.

For those that compiled the ‘Systematic Collection’ of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the “young monk” that caused Antony’s grief was attacked by *pride*. For the

²⁵³ *Apophth. (AC)*, John the Dwarf, 13. “Ἐἶπεν ὁ ἀββάς Ποιμὴν περὶ τοῦ ἀββά Ἰωάννου τοῦ κολοβοῦ, ὅτι παρεκάλεσε τὸν Θεόν, καὶ ἦρθη τὰ πάθη ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, καὶ γέγονεν ἀμεριμνος. Καὶ ἀπελθὼν, εἶπέ τινα γέροντι: Ὁρῶ ἑμαυτὸν ἀναπαυόμενον, καὶ μηδένα πόλεμον ἔχοντα. Καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων: Ὑπαγε, παρακάλεσον τὸν Θεόν, ὥστε τὸν πόλεμόν σοι ἐλθεῖν, καὶ ἦν εἶχες πρότερον συντριβὴν καὶ ταπείνωσιν: διὰ γὰρ τῶν πολέμων προκόπτει ἡ ψυχὴ. Παρεκάλεσεν οὖν, καὶ ἐλθόντος τοῦ πολέμου, οὐκ ἔτι εὕξατο ἀρθῆναι αὐτὸν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔλεγε: Δός μοι, Κύριε, ὑπομονὴν ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις” [trans. Ward]. Cf. *Ibid*, Poemen, 13. *Ibid*, Syncletica, 7. *Apophth. (SysC)* 7.29: “τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ μοναχοῦ ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς φαίνεται” (the hall-mark of the monk becomes manifest in temptations).

²⁵⁴ *Apophth. (AC)*, Orsisius.2.

desert fathers –whose positions Evagrius was expressing-- *pride* was the most subtle vice. Unlike every other sin, it sprang together with spiritual perfection, as a parasite of the virtue. According to Ramfos, *pride* was the sin when one believed that he/she had reached spiritual perfection. This is clearly the context within which Paphnutius had presented his discourse. The ascetics of the *Lausiac History* were affected by *pride*: they believed the demonic suggestion that they had reached perfection; they rejected the warnings coming from the ascetical community, and even thought that they were worthy to encounter Christ. Thus, for the desert literature, *pride* was the sin to count on oneself, dismissing the ascetical community and becoming isolated. *Pride* was an ethical temptation that originated within the ascetical self.²⁵⁵ For Keller, *pride* was “ingratitude” towards God.²⁵⁶

According to Driscoll’s examination of Paphnutius’ discourse, Evagrius devised the motif of divine abandonment to show the interaction between *praktiké* and the contemplative life.²⁵⁷ Hausherr anticipated Driscoll’s observation by pointing out the bond between the experience of divine abandonment and the three stages of ascetical life: *praktiké*, *physiké* and *theologia*. For Hausherr, the experience was featured in all stages of spiritual life.²⁵⁸ Such an argument has maintained that, for Evagrius, *apatheia* was not a static condition. The acquisition of the divine did not protect the soul from experiencing divine withdrawal. Despite the fact that O’Laughlin did not actually discuss the motif of divine abandonment in Evagrius, nevertheless, he pointed to the interaction between *praktiké* and the contemplative life in Evagrius’ system: “The feet of Christ are *πρακτική* and contemplation. If he puts his feet on all his enemies, then all will know *πρακτική* and contemplation”.²⁵⁹ That the soul contemplated the divine mysteries did not mean that she was no longer subject to the former; nor was the *praktiké* depriving the soul from glimpses of the divine splendour.

²⁵⁵ Ramfos, ‘Humility’, in *Pelican in the Wilderness*, 183-195. Ramfos turned his attention to the fact that humility required ethical vigilance due to the fact that, in the desert, ethical perfection could create a reputation among the co-ascetics that, eventually, damaged ascetical humility.

²⁵⁶ Keller, ‘Humility’, 137.

²⁵⁷ Driscoll, ‘Paphnutius’, 274.

²⁵⁸ Hausherr, *Les Versions*, 113. Cf. Evagrius, *KephGn.*, 1.10.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Evagrius, *KephGn.*, 6.15 and 5.35: “if the bread of reasonable nature is the contemplation of beings, and if we have received the command to eat this ‘in sweat of our face’ (Gn 3:19), it is evident that it is through *πρακτική* that we eat this”. [trans. O’Laughlin, 137-138].

Guillaumont examined the notion of *apatheia* in Clement and Evagrius.²⁶⁰ Due to the stoic echoes that the term held, *apatheia* was viewed as a condition of emotional indifference, where the soul had put off every emotion and disposition. However, Guillaumont illustrated aptly that the Evagrian *apatheia* was not the Stoic –or Clementine in some respects- ethical and emotional indifference. Evagrius gave an ascetical content to the term. For him, it designated the stage where the soul remained subject to demonic attacks. At this stage, thoughts continued to pop up within the mind. Yet, the soul would not give her consent to the passions.²⁶¹ As O’Laughlin aptly observed, Evagrius discussed the passing of the soul from *praktiké* to the contemplative life. However, Evagrius was returning to “issues of *πρακτική* which remain constant once the desired level of impassibility is reached. Temptation and opposition continue to affect even accomplished monks”.²⁶² Evagrius did not envisage the spiritual stages in a strict order of consecutive steps. He has rather outlined the interaction between the ethical and the contemplative life. It is true that, for him, in order for the soul to pass from ethical struggles to contemplation, she needed to master her passions and thoughts. *Pride*, according to Driscoll’s comment, “[is] an especially subtle temptation because it bases itself on what is of genuine good in the monk’s life”.²⁶³ Evagrius listed *pride* and *vainglory* as the most subtle and supreme temptations that threatened the soul.²⁶⁴ What is more important is the fact that *pride* was actually associated with *apatheia*.²⁶⁵ For Evagrius, the presence of *pride* was a sign of spiritual progress. It was the last temptation that the soul had to face. However, this temptation, unlike the others, originated from the virtues and interacted with them. *Pride* actually appeared after the acquisition of *apatheia*.

²⁶⁰ Guillaumont, ‘Le Gnostique chez Clément d’ Alexandre et Évagre’, in *Études sur la spiritualité de l’orient chrétien*, Spiritualité Orientale 66 (Béglrolles-en-Mauges : Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996), 151-160. Cf Guillaumont’s introduction in Evagrius, *Traite pratique ou le moine*, vol. 1, A. and C. Guillaumont (ed.), SC 170 (1971), 98.

²⁶¹ Evagrius, *Prakt.* 6 and 74-75. Cf. Ousley, *Theology of Prayer*, 174.

²⁶² M. W. O’Laughlin, *Origenism in the Desert: Anthropology and Integration in Evagrius Ponticus* (PhD Thesis: Harvard University, 1987), 241.

²⁶³ Driscoll, *Evagrius*, 228.

²⁶⁴ Evagrius, *De Octo*, 15-19 [PG 79, 1160-1165]. Evagrius, *Prakt.* 14.

²⁶⁵ Evagrius, *Orat.*, 37 [PG 79, 1176]: “First of all pray to be purified from your passions. Secondly, pray to be delivered from ignorance. Thirdly, pray to be freed from all temptation and abandonment” [trans. Bamberger]. Cf. Driscoll, *Evagrius*, 234-235 [Driscoll cites Evagrius, *Orat.*, 38 (*sic*)]. Following Hausherr, Driscoll discerned the distinction between the three stages of spiritual life behind Evagrius words. The warfare against the passion belonged to the initial stage where the soul was struggling in the *praktiké*. The second stage was fighting ignorance and led the soul to knowledge, thus signifying the passage from *praktiké* to the contemplative life. The third stage was fighting *pride* thus establishing the soul to undisrupted contemplation. Ir. Hausherr, *Les Leçons d’un contemplatif: Le traité de l’oraison d’Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1960), 55.

In a chain of chapters in his *Ad Monachos*, Evagrius addressed the passing of the soul from *praktiké* to the contemplative life.²⁶⁶ He began by introducing the presence of *apatheia* in the soul and the acquisition of contemplation (*gnosis*).²⁶⁷ Yet, “[w]hen the spirit begins to be free from all distractions as it makes its prayer then there commences an all-out battle day and night against the irascible part”.²⁶⁸ At this point, the soul was attacked by prideful thought. Like the monks of the *Lausiac History*, the soul was presented with apparitions and dreams by the demons.²⁶⁹

The demon of *pride* is the cause of the most damaging fall for the soul. For it induces the monk to deny that God is his helper and to consider that he himself is the cause of virtuous actions. Further, he gets a big head in regard to the brethren, considering them stupid because they do not all have the same opinion with him.²⁷⁰

Evagrius was warning against ethical backsliding. His lines are an abbreviation of Paphnutius’ response to the reasons that led the monks of the *Lausiac History* to their ethical destruction: having achieved *apatheia*, the soul was afflicted by *pride*. She believed in her achievements, and thus forsook God’s assistance. Evagrius concluded that *pride* resulted in divine abandonment. The latter motif was viewed in terms of God correcting the soul’s corruption. Abandonment re-established the notion of human frailty within the ascetical soul:

Do not give your heart to *pride*
and do not say before the face of God ‘Powerful am I’;
lest the Lord abandon your soul
and evil demons bring it low.
For then the enemies will flutter around you through the air,
and fearful nights will follow you.²⁷¹

According to Driscoll’s examination of the Evagrian discourse in the *Ad Monachos*, the experience was meant to restore the soul’s humility, and instruct her about her weakness. It turned the soul against sin. Yet, in Evagrius’ ethical system, even after

²⁶⁶ Evagrius, *Prakt.* 63-70.

²⁶⁷ It began with the *nous* discerning its own light.

²⁶⁸ Evagrius, *Prakt.* 63.

²⁶⁹ According to Driscoll, Evagrius had clearly incorporated the stories of monks that he personally knew in his ethical theory. The monks had been deceived by apparitions, as it was the case in the *Lausiac History*. Thus, his theory was established on an ethical realism. Driscoll, ‘Evagrius and Paphnutius’, 279: “Experience with fallen monks is what probably gives him the details of his description”.

²⁷⁰ Evagrius, *Prakt.* 14.

²⁷¹ Evagrius, *AdMon.* 62:

“Μὴ δῶς υπερηφανία σὴν καρδίαν
καὶ μὴ εἴπῃς πρὸ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ: δυνατός εἰμι,
ἵνα μὴ κύριος ἐγκαταλίπῃ σὴν ψυχὴν,
καὶ πονηροὶ δαίμονες ταπεινώσουσιν αὐτήν.
τότε γάρ σε δι’ ἀέρος πτοήσουσιν οἱ ἐχθροί,
νύκτες δὲ φοβεραὶ διαδέξονται σε” [trans. Driscoll]. Cf. Driscoll, *Evagrius*, 56.

this experience, the soul was not firm in the condition of ethical *apatheia*. She remained subject to backsliding:

The hate we have for the demons helps our salvation a great deal, and it favours the practice of virtue. Yet we are not strong enough to nourish it in ourselves like a good seed, for spirits that love pleasure destroy it and summon the soul back to its old love and habits. But, the doctor of souls cures this love, or rather this horrible gangrene, through abandonment. He permits that we suffer some terror caused by them, during the night and during the day, and so the soul comes again back to its original hate, having learning from David to say to the Lord, 'With perfect hatred I have hated them; they have become my enemies to me (Ps 138:22)'. For this is the one who hates his enemies with a perfect hate, the one who sins never in act nor in thought. Such is proof of the first and the greatest passionlessness.²⁷²

In his *Gnostikos*, Evagrius presented the case that divine abandonment resulted in hatred of sin and *apatheia*. In his *On Evil Thoughts*, he elaborated further by pointing to the pedagogical character of the experience. According to Hausherr, the motif of hatred of sin, the knowledge of one's weakness, and also ethical *apatheia* were terms intimately related to the experience of divine abandonment. When we take into consideration that all the above terms appeared in the context of spiritual maturity, it is evident that Evagrius highlighted the interaction between *praktiké* and contemplative life. The presence of *pride* after the acquisition of *apatheia* from the soul distanced the Evagrian ethical theory from the Stoic notion of emotional indifference. In Evagrius, ethical *apatheia* and divine *abandonment* were interacting stages within the spiritual life.²⁷³ Abandonment resulted in *apatheia*, and it maintained *apatheia* within the soul.²⁷⁴ However, the soul continued to experience spiritual rest and ethical warfare. For Evagrius, the soul could not have reached perfection in this life. She only gained glimpses of the fulfillment yet to come.

With the above observations we have intended to put the Evagrian notion of divine abandonment into its right eschatological perspective. The interplay between *praktiké* and the contemplative life was another way for Evagrius to postpone the soul's ethical fulfillment. Indeed, the life of *apatheia* could not be identified with the notion of completion in Evagrius' work. To establish this position, we need to take into consideration his *Great Letter* and, most importantly, his *Kephalaia Gnostica*. Within the two works, Evagrius provided a fair understanding of what he envisaged

²⁷² Evagrius, *Cogitat.* 10. [trans. Driscoll in idem 'Paphnutius', 280]

²⁷³ Evagrius, *KephGn.* 1.10: "Among the demons, some are opposed to the practice of the commandments, others are opposed to the intellections of nature, others are opposed to the words concerning God, because the knowledge of our health consists of these three things" [trans. Ousley, 172ff].

²⁷⁴ Driscoll, 'Paphnutius', 282-283.

as perfection. It is in the latter book, however, that Evagrius illustrated the interaction between *praktiké* and contemplative life in vigorous terms.²⁷⁵ In the former, Evagrius discussed the exact nature of Christian perfection.

Regardless of the speculative character of the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, its history within the context of the Origenist controversy (6th-century)²⁷⁶ and the esoteric features of the *Great Letter* which have become a point of scholarly friction,²⁷⁷ the fact remains that, in both works, Evagrius established the notion of perfection within an eschatological horizon. Evagrius was following Origen and Nicæa in showing deification as the work of the incarnation. However, according to Evagrius, the deification of the human nature remained unfulfilled due to the eschatological character of Christianity.²⁷⁸ As O’Laughlin observed, Evagrius conceived “unity” as the culmination of the spiritual life.²⁷⁹ Characteristically, Evagrius referred to the “unity of the minds” in the final restoration – a position that has ignited a long debate about his orthodoxy since late antiquity.²⁸⁰ In his *Great Letter*, Evagrius wrote of the motion of the “minds” (νόες) like rivers that met the great sea (i.e. the Godhead).²⁸¹ In this “sea” all the “minds” were unified, abolishing every distinction in terms of numbers, names and forms. For O’Laughlin, this unification was understood as the eschatological restoration (i.e. fulfillment) that could not be achieved in this life.²⁸² It is not our purpose here to examine the firmness of Evagrian esotericism. What is of importance is the fact that Evagrius presented us with a clear vision of what perfection was for him: as with Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius addressed perfection in the present life only in relative terms. This present life provided only glimpses of this great sea, i.e. the Trinity.

Apatheia was a stage of relative ethical perfection that interacted with *praktiké* and the contemplative life. According to Evagrius’ vision of the future perfection, the soul remained subject to her weakness in this life, facing spiritual foes such as *pride* in every step. However, like Origen, Evagrius did not deprive the soul of spiritual

²⁷⁵ O’Laughlin, *Origenism*, 137-138.

²⁷⁶ See A. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Kephalaia Gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens*, Patristica Sorbonensia 5 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962). Also, O’Laughlin, *Origenism*. A. M. Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁷⁷ Casiday, *Evagrius*, 28ff.

²⁷⁸ O’Laughlin, *Origenism*, 119.

²⁷⁹ Evagrius, *The Great Letter (Ad Melaniam [sic])*, 22. Cf. Jn 17:22. 1 Cor 15:28.

²⁸⁰ Evagrius, *KephGn.* 1.6-8. Guillaumont, *Kephalaia Gnostica*, 39.

²⁸¹ Evagrius, *The Great Letter*, 27ff and 66.

²⁸² O’Laughlin, ‘Eschatology’, in *Origenism*, 150ff.

consolation: spiritual efforts were followed by rest and joy. But, even this joy could easily turn to anxiety and *pride*. Evagrius related sadness to the soul's unfulfilled desire. Unlike Gregory, Evagrius presented a negative understanding of desire. Desire led the soul to expectations. The failure to fulfil this desire for spiritual progress led the soul to sadness. Evagrius complemented the description of the soul's uninterrupted ascension to the unity of divine life in his more esoteric works.²⁸³

This tension between spiritual realism and theological eschatology was also maintained in authors that were closely associated with Evagrius: i.e. Macarius and Diadochus. Macarius presented both strands of ascetical thought. On the one hand, he highlighted the works of divine grace within the soul. On the other hand, he illustrated an ethical realism: the soul was not secure in her spiritual ascension. Macarius/Symeon was well acquainted with Paphnutius' discourse: "how those who are activated by the grace of God fall"?²⁸⁴ In his ethical 'realism', and despite that Macarius had argued the divine presence within the soul, he did not deny a potential ethical backsliding. In fact, according to him, perfection could be achieved only through ethical trials.²⁸⁵ Macarius discerned periods of spiritual rest and ethical struggles in the spiritual life: the ascetical soul was at rest, and then she was afflicted by demonic thoughts anew. For Macarius, only the spiritually naïve could have imagined that the divine presence meant the cessation of passions and thoughts within the soul. The main point of Macarius' discourse was the co-existence of the grace and sin within the soul. That is not to say that the soul was at one and the same time acquainted with both the grace and sin. What Macarius meant was that the soul was a battlefield between the two spiritual factors. He integrated this position in his

²⁸³ It might be the case that behind the riddles concerning the transformation of the spiritual bodies and the existence of other worlds yet to come, Evagrius attempted to present eschatology as an open horizon without limiting himself to the temporal notion of death or even the Second Coming. As it was the case with Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Kephalaia Gnostica*, Evagrius was unwilling to give a temporal definition to the notion of the final restoration. It is true that Evagrius has baffled modern scholars with his thought on the transformation of humanity to the state of the angels and the foundation of new worlds. Cf. Guillaumont, *Kephalaia Gnostica*, 113ff. O'Laughlin, *Origenism*, 130 and especially 150ff. We need to approach Evagrius work by taking into consideration his unwillingness to define a notion of how eschatological restoration would be, and also define a time that there would be no spiritual progress. Evagrius was well acquainted with Gregory of Nyssa and he might have known the latter's theory on *epektasis* which Evagrius clothed with the language of bodily transformation and eternal creation. The degree to which we could take his descriptions on what eschatology would include at face value remains questionable. Maybe his description was not one of what eschatology could be; but it touched upon the open eschatological horizon, as in Gregory of Nyssa and Didymos.

²⁸⁴ Macarius, *Hom.* 7.4: "Καὶ πῶς πίπτουσιν οἱ ἐνεργούμενοι ὑπὸ χάριτος θεοῦ;"

²⁸⁵ Macarius, *Hom.* 17.5.

thought by appropriating the notion of divine withdrawal: the grace diminished when the demonic presence was at hand due to human free agency. Notwithstanding the divine presence, sin always remained within the soul afflicting her. According to Plested's exposition of the Macarian ascetical theory, Macarius was well aware of the Platonic definition of evil as 'non-being'. But Macarius was not constructing an ontology in his thought. He was addressing ethical laxity, thus exaggerating the works of the grace and also highlighting human frailty.²⁸⁶ Macarius' position seems to have been shaped through his interaction with his fellow-ascetics. This is the reason why we called his ethical theory "realistic". As in Paphnutius' case, Macarius was addressing the ethical fall of ascetics. For Macarius, the ascetical life was synonymous with spiritual warfare. It was through "the narrow way" that the soul needed to walk to reach perfection.²⁸⁷ An exaggeration of the work of grace on Macarius' part would have diminished the ideal of *ascesis* as continuous spiritual vigilance.

For the reason that Macarius highlighted the works of divine grace within the soul, it was only through the theme of diminution of the divine presence within the soul that he could compromise this position with his spiritual realism concerning trials. In his ascetical program, the notion of divine withdrawal was of central importance:

The grace exists always inside, and it is rooted, and it is leavened from a young age, and it has become like a natural and fixed thing of one nature with what is in man. And it takes care of man in many ways as it pleases for his profit. Sometimes the fire burns and blazes even more, sometimes it is softer and milder; and this light, sometimes, it burns and shines even more, sometimes it shrinks and grows gloomier.²⁸⁸

Using the analogy between a lamp and the light of the lamp, Macarius indicated the varying degrees to which the divine grace manifested its presence within the soul: the divine grace revealed itself in full-strength; but it also diminished. For Macarius the presence of divine grace varied.²⁸⁹ This variation was illustrated by putting side by side divine presence and also divine *withdrawal-abandonment*. We need to be reminded that, in Macarius, the two latter terms were synonymous. Both themes

²⁸⁶ Plested, *Macarian Legacy*, 36ff.

²⁸⁷ Macarius, *Serm.* 55.2ff.

²⁸⁸ Macarius, *Hom.* 8.2: "Ἡ μὲν χάρις ἀδιαλείπτως σύνεσι, καὶ ἐρριζῶται καὶ ἐζύμῳται ἐκ νέας ἡλικίας καὶ ὡς φυσικὸν καὶ πηκτὸν ἐγένετο αὐτὸ τὸ συνὸν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ὡς μία οὐσία, πολυτρόπῳ δὲ ὡς θέλει πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον οἰκονομεῖ τὸν ἀνθρώπον. ποτὲ μὲν πλεον ἐκκαίεται καὶ ἄπτεται τὸ πῦρ, ποτὲ δὲ ὡς μαλθακότερον καὶ πραύτερον, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς κατὰ καιροῦς πλεον ἐξάπτεται καὶ λάμπει, ποτὲ δὲ ὑποστέλλεται καὶ στυγνάζει".

²⁸⁹ Macarius, *Typs.* 10.3.

pointed out divine consent. However, the latter motif highlighted human free-agency. The former illustrated divine pedagogy even for the soul that was spiritually firm. Both motifs were connected to i) the diminution of grace and ii) afflictions by the demons.²⁹⁰ Macarius emphasised divine consent and also human responsibility in order to compromise between the efficacy of grace (i.e. incarnation) and ethical realism (i.e. ethical backsliding).²⁹¹

Macarius shed light on the multifaceted concept of divine *withdrawal*. Like Paphnutius, Macarius noted that divine pedagogy safeguarded the soul from her ethical fall. Macarius employed the image of Paul to indicate that the foe of *pride* remained present in the spiritual life.²⁹² It comes not as a surprise that Macarius placed *pride* at the centre of his ethical thought. But what is important is the fact that Macarius made *pride* a part of human nature. For Macarius, *pride* was an immanent feature of human nature. In fact, Macarius implicitly employed the Origenist notion of *pride* in connection to the devil's fall due to *pride*, and the subsequent fall of Adam. According to Macarius, the "pure" nature inclined to *pride*.²⁹³ In fact it was the presence of divine grace that resulted in *pride*. While discussing the image of Paul, Macarius was actually addressing ascetics who were deceived about their ethical perfection.²⁹⁴

But Macarius also maintained a more intellectual argument illustrating his interaction with Evagrian and also Gregorian thought. For the Alexandrian ascetic, the spiritual life was established on the dialectics between grace and ethical trials.²⁹⁵ This polarity extended even to the level of spiritual perfection. In fact, as it was in Evagrius, Macarius showed the relative character of this perfection: the soul experienced divine presence and withdrawal while progressing ethically. There is no

²⁹⁰ Macarius, *Typs.* 9.1-2.

²⁹¹ In order to refute spiritual dualism, Macarius argued that it was only due to divine consent that the soul experienced demonic attacks. However, he underestimated his own argument by using vivid images that suggested that the demons were actually independent spiritual factors within the soul. For the transformation of the demons from divine agents to divine adversaries see the classical articles under the title 'Démon', in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 3, 141-219 [by S. Lyonnet, 141-152 for the Old and New Testament demonologies; J. Daniélou, 153-189 for classical views up to Origen; and Cl. and A. Guillaumont, 190-219 for the patristic period]. Also the two invaluable contributions by E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Idem, *Pagan and Christian*. See the most inclusive monograph on Christian monastic demonologies by D. Brakke, *Demons and the Monk*.

²⁹² Macarius, *Hom.* 7.4.

²⁹³ Macarius, *Hom. op. cit.*: "ἔχει γὰρ ἡ καθαρὰ φύσις τὸ ἐπαίρεσθαι" (the pure nature has [as its property] to become proud).

²⁹⁴ Macarius, *Hom.* 17.5.

²⁹⁵ Macarius, *Œuvres Spirituelles I: Homélie propre à la Collection III V*. Desprez (ed.), SC 275, (1980), 60-61.

indication in Macarius that the soul was ever redeemed from this bipolarity in this present life. Macarius turned to the recurrent theme of poverty and richness: the person that was rich needed to expect [spiritual] poverty. But he was also aware that after poverty richness would be restored again.²⁹⁶

Macarius' thought was not as systematic as it is presented here. However, one could discern four positions that were of central importance in the Macarian thought. The four positions indicate the contexts within which Macarius addressed divine withdrawal/abandonment as an integral part of spiritual maturity:

- i) *gnosis*
- ii) training
- iii) ministry
- iv) eschatology

i) Macarius/Symeon was interacting with the Evagrian ascetical theory: divine withdrawal resulted in *gnosis* of both good and evil. As Plested put it, "the coexistence of sin and grace is permitted so as to educate and to form the soul".²⁹⁷ It is only through the experience of divine withdrawal that the soul knew the two natures within her:

So by the experience of the two natures, tasting frequently both the bitterness of sin and the sweetness of grace the soul might become more perceptive and more vigilant, so as to flee evil entirely, and to attach itself wholly to the Lord.²⁹⁸

This sort of knowledge included the knowledge of the human nature, and also addressed the nature of divine grace and sin. Through this ethical experience, the soul maintained a strong notion of her weakness. But, primarily, she was acquainted with the true character of the divine and demonic. We need to see this argument in the context of Macarius' position on free-will. Only through full knowledge of both the divine and the demonic could the soul have chosen to follow one of them.

ii) Macarius also discerned the notion of continuous training through divine *withdrawal*. It was the dominical exhortation with regard to the "narrow gate" that informed Macarius' position. Asceticism was established on the notion of ethical training. For Macarius, there was no time that the soul was not expected to conduct her spiritual warfare. His argument could not be isolated from his thought regarding human weakness and spiritual vigilance. However, Macarius integrated the desert

²⁹⁶ Macarius, *Hom.* 10.1; 15.42 and 27.6.

²⁹⁷ Plested, *Macarian Legacy*, 37.

²⁹⁸ Macarius, *Typs.* 12.2 [trans. Plested in idem, *Macarian Legacy*, 37].

concept of continuous spiritual efforts and divine training by indicating that it was Adam who was given the concept of spiritual warfare first. In fact, Macarius went so far as to introduce ethical determinism: the demons were introduced in creation so that Adam could find an ethical opponent. Once more, Macarius was not establishing an ascetical-theological ontology. He devised this position to argue the spiritual norm of human life conducted in spiritual trials.²⁹⁹

Macarius did not identify ethical trials with divine absence. For Macarius, even divine presence was a trial. Even though he expressed the notion of divine abandonment in terms of ethical misfortunes and demonic assaults, Macarius discerned the divine presence within trials. Through ethical afflictions, God was testing the soul's love and disposition. According to Macarius, the spiritual rest that the soul experienced before the presence of the divine could lead the soul to ethical laxity. Thus, God gave the soul rest in order to observe whether the soul inclined to laxity or not. Through interchanging periods of trials and divine assistance, God was testing the soul's endurance and spiritual alertness: at times of trials the soul could turn against God. While in spiritual rest, she could forsake her ethical vigilance. Thus, for Macarius, spiritual rest was not a reward. It was another form of testing the soul's alertness.³⁰⁰

iii) Plested pointed out the interaction between Macarius and Gregory of Nyssa. It is difficult to support which author anticipated the other. It is a fact, however, that Macarius dissociated divine withdrawal from sin, establishing a broader argument. When inquired about the case of the apostles, Macarius noted that their experience of ethical trials illustrated the function of the apostles within the community. He acknowledged that, when caught up in divine inebriation, the soul forsook her personal needs being "fed" and "clothed" by God.³⁰¹ For Macarius, the soul could have stayed in this stage unceasingly. Yet, God was withdrawing his presence, so that the soul could experience her human natural need and also interact with the Christian community. Like in Gregory's *De Vita Moisis* and *Homiliae*, the soul was always connected to the community. She was communicating her spiritual

²⁹⁹ Macarius, *Serm.* 55.2.8.

³⁰⁰ Macarius, *Serm.* 57.1.

³⁰¹ An implication that God fulfilled the soul's very "being" with his presence. Cf. Mk 9:3 and Nu 6:15.

experience with the uninitiated souls.³⁰² Thus, Macarius envisaged the role of the virtuous man within the community in the light of divine *withdrawal*. Yet, even in this context, Macarius did not abolish the connection between *withdrawal* and ethical trials. The Macarian ideal of communal service addressed the Messalian position that prayer was the only activity required from ascetics. According to Macarius, God was instructing the soul to minister the community by diminishing his divine grace. Thus, the acquisition of divine grace was not the only ascetical ideal; the ministering of the community (i.e. spiritual direction) was also valued highly in the ascetic thought.

iv) Macarius also appropriated an Origenist/Evagrian eschatology that showed the relative character of spiritual perfection in this life. For Macarius, God was directing history to a final fulfilment where the soul was finally introduced into the kingdom of God. Considering the fact that the soul experienced spiritual rest in this life, Macarius could not overlook the eschatological perspective of Christian asceticism. Macarius highlighted the fact that the soul experienced divine rest and also ethical trials in order to distinguish between this present life and the eschatological rest of the soul:

This present time is for grief and tears, that age is of smiling and joy; this present time is of the cross and death, that time is of redemption and unspoken pleasure; this present time is of the narrow and hard way, that time is of rest and peace.³⁰³

Macarius juxtaposed the “engagement of the Spirit”³⁰⁴ that featured the “consolation” of the soul (παράκλησις) to the “perfect rest” and “rewarding” (τέλεια ανάπαυσις και ανταπόδοσις). Spiritual perfection could be fulfilled only in the life to come. As Macarius put it, this present life featured grieving and pain: Macarius was exhorting to ethical vigilance and *ascesis*. Yet, the life to come meant the final ethical completion of the soul: the latter position maintained the eschatological orientation of the Christian Gospel. Macarius provided an argument that was clothed with eschatological meanings: the spiritual life was directed to a final completion which was not to be identified with the present consolations. What featured at the heart of his argument was the presence of the cross which anticipated the future redemption.

Macarius’ thought was dispersed within the vast volume of spiritual homilies, characterised by their polemical character against the extreme ascetical tendencies of

³⁰² Macarius was aware of this fact: he ministered the ascetical community as a spiritual director for disciples such as Evagrius. Cf. Gregory, *Life of Moses*, 1.56.

³⁰³ Macarius, *Typs.* 10.3. Cf. Mt 7:14. 2 Cor 6:2.

³⁰⁴ 2 Cor 1:22.

the Messalians. It was Diadochus of Photice that brought Macarian thought into a remarkable systematic synthesis. Diadochus enriched Macarian ethical thought while moderating the latter's Messalian overtones. Even though scholars have treated the notion of divine *pedagogy* and *aversion* in Diadochus, they have not provided any insights in the eschatological character of his ethical theory.

To begin with, Diadochus highlighted divine assistance within the soul. Yet, this assistance never took the form of Athanasian perfection. For Diadochus, this assistance was a *consolation* that rested and encouraged the soul.³⁰⁵ Diadochus was following the established ascetical position, expressed through Evagrius, that denied ethical perfection in the present:

So it is possible here for those who progress to perfection to taste her (charity) continuously; but, no-one could possess her completely, until the mortal has been swallowed up by life.³⁰⁶

The ethical perfection of the present life was only a foretaste, not fulfillment. For Diadochus, there was a distinction between continuously tasting and actually possessing perfection. Thus, Diadochus resolved the observed theological tension between the two traditions depicting the soul dialectically in perfection and ethical trials. For Diadochus, the soul participated in both conditions. The tasting of perfection was not synonymous to the acquisition of perfection. Diadochus was following Macarius in distinguishing between an “initiating joy” (εἰσαγωγὸς χαρὰ) and the “fulfilling joy” (τελειοποιὸς χαρὰ).³⁰⁷ What stood between the two conditions was the notion of divine withdrawal in order for the soul to experience ethical trials. Diadochus did not deny the intensity of the experience. As he related, even within the context of pedagogical abandonment, the memory of the diminishing divine grace was grieving the soul: “Thus, the soul is even more sorrowful at the memory of the spiritual love, without it being possible to possess it in her senses through the deprivation of the most perfect pains.”³⁰⁸ However, Diadochus denied that divine abandonment caused despair for the soul. What Diadochus designated as “moderate

³⁰⁵ Diadochus, *Keph.* 32 and 76: “μικραῖς παραχωρήσει καὶ πυκναῖς παρακλήσειν παρ’ αὐτῆς [τῆς χάριτος] γαλουχοῦμεθα” (we are fed by the grace through short small concessions and many consolations).

³⁰⁶ Diadochus, *Keph.* 90.4: “ὥστε οὖν γεύεσθαι μὲν αὐτῆς (ἀγάπης) ἐνταῦθα συνεχῶς οἱ εἰς τελειότητα προκόπτοντες δύνανται, τελείως δὲ αὐτὴν οὐδεὶς δύναται κτήσασθαι, εἰ μὴ ὅταν καταποθῆ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς”.

³⁰⁷ Diadochus, *Keph.* 60.

³⁰⁸ Diadochus, *Keph.* 90: “ὄθεν πλέον ἀλγύνεται ἡ ψυχὴ φέρουσα μὲν τὴν μνήμην τῆς πνευματικῆς ἀγάπης, μὴ δυναμένη δὲ αὐτὴν ἐν αἰσθήσει κτήσασθαι διὰ τὴν τῶν τελειοτάτων πόνων ὑστέρησιν”.

despair” (σύμμετρος ἀπελπισμός) expressed the idea that God remained hidden from the soul, but at the same time strengthening her. Thus, it was the hidden divine presence that was resolving the soul’s despair. But this is not a reason to deny the intensity of the experience. The soul did experience great grief (λύπη πολλή): “the soul is even more sorrowful”.³⁰⁹

If we take into account Diadochus’ distinction between the tasting and the possession of ethical perfection, then it is apparent that the stages of “initial” joy and “final joy”, and also the periods of spiritual rest and ethical trials were dialectical conditions complementing each other. What it was observed by Ousley with regard to Evagrius’ ethical theory is also valid for the Diadochean ascetical theory: divine grace and spiritual struggles were interacting features of ascetical life.³¹⁰ Diadochus introduced the notion of hidden grace that was working within the soul. According to his position, the soul did not always discern the presence of grace within her. What Diadochus affirmed was the closeness and at the same time hiddenness of God within the soul.³¹¹ God was close to the soul through the presence of his divine grace. But he was also hiding from the soul, assisting through a mysterious power. For Diadochus, the dialectic between hidden and revealed divinity applied to the ethical life of the soul: divine manifestation and hiddenness was a spiritual norm that was expressed through the dialectical character of spiritual rest and ethical trials. The notion of divine *withdrawal* in Diadochus highlighted the fact that it was God that was the main spiritual factor in the soul’s struggles to approach ethical perfection.

Diadochus also linked the spiritual life to the acquisition of the virtues. According to Diadochus, charity was the highest virtue. As in Evagrius, *charity* was a virtue that related the soul to her fellow-men.³¹² But also, it was the virtue standing at the summit of the spiritual life.³¹³ For Diadochus, divine withdrawal established

³⁰⁹ Diadochus, *Keph. op. cit.*

³¹⁰ Ousley, *Theology of Prayer*, 197.

³¹¹ Diadochus wrote about the *lamp of gnosis* (λύχνος τῆς γνώσεως) that needed to remain lit, echoing Abba Orsisius and also Paul. Diadochus, *Keph.* 28.9. Cf. 1 Th 5:19 and *Apophth. (AC)*, Orsisius, 2: “ἀγνώστως τὰ πολλὰ ἐνεργεῖ τῇ θεολόγῳ ψυχῇ τὰ ἐαυτῆς μυστήρια” ([grace] in a secret way works her mysteries within the divine-instructed soul). In 77.1, Diadochus played with the antinomy of the words “ἐγκρύπτειν” (hiding) and “παρεῖν” (as “παρουσία” in the text, i.e. presence) and then moved to say that, even when it was withdrawn, “divine grace communicates part of her goods to soul” (προσομιλεῖ τῇ ψυχῇ μέρος τι τῶν ἐαυτῆς ἀγαθῶν).

³¹² See the 9th definition in Diadochus’ introductory paragraph. Also: Diadochus, *Keph.* 34 and 74.

³¹³ See the 2nd definition in Diadochus’ introductory paragraph. Also: Diadochus, *Keph.* 34 and 89-90. Diadochus distinguished between the natural love that the soul possesses as a natural property and

charity in the soul. Through experience, the soul was instructed about the transcendental character of *charity*: the latter was not to be identified with any other virtue.³¹⁴ In its relation to *charity* as the summit of the spiritual life, divine withdrawal signaled spiritual maturity. In his thought, Diadochus minimised the elegant distinction between divine *pedagogy* and divine *aversion*: Diadochus pointed to the transcendental character of the experience. At the end of the day, the experience was related to the knowledge of what charity was.³¹⁵

The transcending character of *charity* urged Diadochus to argue for the relative nature of spiritual perfection. Divine abandonment indicated that spiritual perfection was not dependent on human efforts:

Whatever he, who has been exercised, believes to be perfection has been imperfection compared to God's wealth in abundance of love; even it has been possible for someone to ascend to the top of the ladder that was shown to Jacob progressing through his efforts.³¹⁶

For Diadochus, God withdrew the manifest presence of his grace so that the soul would distinguish between the divine wealth presented in this life and the actual promised reward of the life to come:³¹⁷ God presented his wealth to the soul, but then withdrew to stir her desire. Diadochus seems to have appropriated the Gregorian notion of God stirring up the soul's desire for him.

iii. Imitation of Christ: *kenosis* and the ascetics.

According to Rossé's examination of the motif of divine abandonment in the Patristic era, it was only after the Middle Ages that Christian literature emphasised the connection between Christ's abandonment on the cross and the abandonment of

the spiritual love that was the gift of the Holy Spirit. With the first love, the soul was progressing to the ethical life. But this love was not sufficient to lead to spiritual perfection. The divine contemplation was commencing only with the acquisition of the second love that was related to the presence of the Holy Spirit within the soul. For an analysis of Diadochean thought on charity, the introduction of Places' remains invaluable. Diadoque de Photicé, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, pg. 48-49.

³¹⁴ Diadochus, *Keph.* 90.

³¹⁵ Diadoque de Photicé, *Œuvres Spirituelles*, pg. 47-48.

³¹⁶ Diadochus, *Keph.* 85. "Τὸ γὰρ τοῦ παιδευομένου νομιζόμενον τέλειον ἀτελές ἐπι ὡς πρὸς τὸν πλοῦτον τοῦ παιδεύοντος ἡμᾶς θεοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ ὑπάρχει φιλοπμίας, κἂν ὄλην τὴν Ἰακώβ δειχθεῖσαν κλίμακα ἀνελεθῆν τις δυνηθῆ τῇ προκοπῇ τῶν πόνων".

³¹⁷ Diadochus, *Keph.* 90: "[γ]εῦει μὲν οὖν τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα ἐν ἀρχαῖς τῆς προκοπῆς, εἶπερ θερμῶς ἐρασθῶμεν τῆς ἀρετῆς τοῦ θεοῦ, τὴν ψυχὴν ἐν πάσῃ αἰσθήσει καὶ πληροφορίᾳ τῆς γλυκύτητος τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ἔχη εἰδέναι ὁ νοῦς ἐν ἀκριβεῖ ἐπιγνώσει τὸ τέλειον ἔπαθλον τῶν φιλοθεῶν πόνων" (at the beginning of the progress, the Holy Spirit gives the soul a taste of the sweetness of God in every sense and fullness, if indeed we ardently yearn for the virtue of God, so that the nous knows in perfect knowledge the supreme trophy of his divine-loving efforts).

the ascetical soul in trials.³¹⁸ According to Rossé --citing Delumeau's witness-- the Rhineland mystics were the first to establish this theological connection. This position suggests that ascetical abandonment was an experience established on the idea that the mystics were "imitators of Christ".³¹⁹ This imitation encompassed all the events and experiences of the spiritual life: divine abandonment was such an experience. The connection between the mystical experience of the soul and Christ's abandonment on the cross illustrated the extension of the work of the incarnation on the ascetic soul.³²⁰ What lies at the heart of this concept is the notion of *kenosis* of the self, understood in dialectical terms of death and resurrection. Christ's *kenosis* led him to the ultimate abandonment on the cross, where he willingly gave up his life and that led to his resurrection and glorification.³²¹ According to Ramfos, the early ascetics pointed to the *kenosis* of the ascetic self through humility: the spiritual life was progressing from egocentrism to *kenosis* and glorification. Such *kenosis* commenced with the withdrawal from the world (ἀναχώρησις) and it reached its climax with the acquisition of *humility* and *obedience*.³²² The image of Christ was standing at the centre of the ascetical *kenosis*:³²³ for Florovsky, Christ's life was a *kenosis* progressing from the Paternal bosom to the maternal womb, the betrayal, the cross and the tomb.³²⁴ Balthasar extended the work of *kenosis* to the ascetic self.³²⁵ In this final chapter, we will discuss the degree to which Byzantine ascetics viewed their own experience of divine abandonment in terms of the "imitation" of Christ's abandonment. Thus, we will examine the meaning that the "imitation" of Christ acquired for the early ascetics. The analysis will be limited to the notion of imitating Christ with regard to the image of the suffering Christ in ascetical literature.³²⁶

Patristic literature discussing Christological issues did not draw the connection between Christ's abandonment and the ascetical experience. That is to say that the

³¹⁸ Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 78.

³¹⁹ Rossé, *ibid*, 97 [footnote 12]. See also, Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*.

³²⁰ Balthasar, *Mysterium*, 75ff.

³²¹ Sakharov, *Archimandrite Sophrony*, 218-219.

³²² Ramfos, *Pelican in the Wilderness*. Ramfos highlighted a progressive *kenosis* that began with the "withdrawal from the power to act" and ended with the *kenosis* of the self through humility. Ramfos called the latter the "withdrawal from being". See also, Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 76.

³²³ Sakharov, *Archimandrite Sophrony*, 224ff.

³²⁴ G. Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, Collected Works 3 (Belmont MA: Nordland, 1976), 100ff.

³²⁵ Balthasar, *Mysterium*, 75ff.

³²⁶ For a thorough analysis of the scriptural origins and also the development of the theme in the patristic era see the article 'Imitation du Christ', *DSp* 7, 1536-1601.

two incidents were never put side by side in late antiquity. Christ's suffering was viewed in terms of assuming the weakness of the human race. But, as it was observed, the link between sin and the results of the fall urged the Patristic authors to refine the way in which Christ accommodated human weakness: Christ assumed the results of sin. However, Christ's experience was distinct from the human experience since the latter was always related to sin: Christ assumed the human condemnation, but he was never condemned. Patristic literature intended to secure the concept that Christ suffered in the same fashion as the human race, but not due to sin (anti-docetism). It was only the human race that remained subject to sin. Christ accommodated the results of sin, not sin *qua* a factor of ethical corruption.

To turn to the ascetic ethical theory, the two authors –as far as I am aware– that introduced a discussion that put Christ's abandonment and the ascetical abandonment side by side were Nemesius and Maximus.³²⁷ Maximus depended on Nemesius.³²⁸ However, the latter did not introduce a 'parallel' experience between Christ and the ascetical soul. Nemesius included this insertion as part of his general discussion on divine providence. His intention was to highlight the providential character of the incarnation: God was working for human redemption. Evagrius might have also introduced this connection –independently– without addressing divine providence. That would have made Evagrius the first author to treat Christ's abandonment as a parallel experience to the abandonment of the ascetical soul. The only passage that supports this position is obscure. The hypothesis depends entirely on the degree to which Guillaumont's translation from Syriac represents the authentic Evagrian discourse.

Unlike Balthasar, Hausherr,³²⁹ Guillaumont³³⁰ and Driscoll³³¹ overlooked the meaning of the introduction. For Sakharov, the Maximian insertion meant a parallel discussion between Christ's experience and the ascetical abandonment:

In Maximus, we find a fairly schematised classification of the various categories of abandonment, which recapitulates the preceding patristic ideas: there is abandonment as a test, as a purification, as the edificatory punishment, and Christ-like abandonment.³³²

³²⁷ Maximus, *Charit.* 4.96 [PG 90, 1072].

³²⁸ See Damascene, *ExpF.* 43 [pg 101].

³²⁹ Hausherr, *Les Versions.* 111ff. Hausherr silently dismissed the fact that Evagrius had vaguely touched upon Christ's experience in his *Gnostikos*. His intention was not to provide a thorough discussion of the Maximian insertion.

³³⁰ Evagrius, *Gnost.* 28 [and subsequent footnotes in SC 356].

³³¹ Driscoll, 'Evagrius and Paphnutius on the Causes of Abandonment'.

³³² Sakharov, *Archimandrite Sophrony*, 254.

Unlike our observation that Maximus only introduced the “ways” in which divine providence has been expressed throughout human history, Sakharov took Maximus’ reference to “kinds” of abandonment at face value: thus Sakharov discerned the introduction of a “Christ-like” experience in Maximus. The term “Christ-like” has a dubious meaning: it either means abandonment as it was in Christ’s case, or it suggests a ‘Christ-like’ model of abandonment. So, was Christ’s experience identical with the abandonment of the ascetic soul? Balthasar denied this hypothesis: Christ’s abandonment was different from that of the ascetical soul.³³³ Taking into consideration the fact that, in his doctoral thesis, Sakharov was trying to establish the patristic foundations for a “Christ-like” model with regard to ascetical abandonment, it seems that, for him, the “oikonomical” abandonment suggests a ‘Christ-like’ model of divine abandonment. But is this what Maximus meant?

To answer this question, we need to return to our earlier observations about the introduction of the theme in Maximus and also John Damascene. Maximus was following Nemesius of Emesa. Thus he did not distinguish between parallel “kinds” of divine abandonment. Maximus’ intention was to show the way in which divine providence corresponds to individual conditions in the light of human salvation. Maximus included the case of Christ, not as a distinct “form” of abandonment. It was another “way” or “cause” that highlighted a different context in which divine providence was working: i.e. salvation of the human race. It is indicative that, whereas the other “kinds” addressed individual redemption, the case of Christ introduced the notion of universal salvation. In addition, the fact that divine *pedagogy* and *aversion* had dominated the ascetical discussion (Macarius, Paphnutius, Diadochus), Maximus abolished this elegant distinction by pointing out the presence of divine providence. But, when Maximus treated the “causes” of demonic afflictions, Maximus did not include Christ’s case. Clearly, Maximus intended to distinguish between human afflictions and the case of Christ. It was the presence of sin as a spiritual factor that urged for this distinction. Because, even in the case of divine abandonment, Maximus discerned the relationship between ethical afflictions and passions,³³⁴ Maximus coined the term “δοκούσης” (seeming) to deny

³³³ Balthasar, *Mysterium*, 78.

³³⁴ Maximus, *Charit.* 4.95 [PG 90, 1072].

the fact that Christ's experience was informed by the presence of passions.³³⁵ Thus, Maximus identified Christ's abandonment with the work of divine providence. But, at an ethical level, he denied an identification between Christ and the other biblical figures. His abandonment was only "seeming": it did not result from sin.

As it was mentioned, in his *Expositio Fidei*, John also introduced the theme of Christ's abandonment.³³⁶ John was only copying from Nemesius, not Maximus. John maintained the Nemesian "δοκούσης". In his *Fragments* on Matthew, John introduced a parallel list with that found in his *Expositio*.³³⁷ In this case, he did not include the "oikonomical" abandonment of Christ. The list of the *Fragments* is a reduction of the one in the *Expositio*. Its elimination shows that Christ's experience was not identical with the rest of the experiences on the list. What urged John to this distinction is also the presence of sin.³³⁸ Whereas every human experience includes a certain degree of ethical corruption, the case of Christ was different in this respect: his abandonment was neither due to sin nor due to divine pedagogy.

The second part of the thesis discussed the scepticism with which Patristic literature of late antiquity approached the accommodation of human weakness from Christ. That is to say, the degree to which Christ's experience of human weakness as "man-like" was taken into serious consideration since it was affecting Christ's divine identity and ethical purity. It was only in a refined way that Patristic literature addressed Christ's experiences in man-like terms. That raises the objection concerning the degree to which we could support that the ascetics could have exemplified their experience of abandonment in Christ-like terms.

But this is not to say that the ascetics did not view their spiritual experiences in Christocentric terms. It was already mentioned that Athanasius presented the ascetical life as resulting from Christ's incarnation and subsequent victory over the passions. Despite the fact that the early ascetics had not developed a connection between Christ's abandonment and the abandonment of the ascetical soul, they had envisaged spiritual life in Christocentric terms. It is true that the ascetics introduced

³³⁵ Maximus, *Charit.* 4.96 [PG 90, 1072]: "ἵνα διὰ τῆς δοκούσης ἐγκαταλείψεως" (so that through the seeming abandonment).

³³⁶ Damascene, *ExpF.* 43 [pg 101].

³³⁷ Damascene, *Fragmenta in Mattheum* (in catenis Nicetæ), PG 96, 1412.

³³⁸ John was commenting on Mt. 27:5 where Judas hanged himself. It is clear that John wanted to emphasise the presence of sin as resulting to divine abandonment and stress the ethical role of human *disposition* (πρόθεσις).

the concept of the “imitation of Christ”. The imitation of Christ was a term that had a biblical origin and was primarily coined after the Pauline language in 1 Cor. 11:1.³³⁹ In the *Systematic Collection* an elder defined the ascetical life as the “imitation of Christ”.³⁴⁰ In late antiquity, the theme was in use in the broader concept of the soul’s being made ‘according to the divine *image*’ and ‘after the divine *likeness*’: for instance, in Clement the *imitation* was linked to the divine *likeness* of the soul.³⁴¹ Origen developed the notion of imitating Christ by following the Pauline exhortation.³⁴² In his exegetical context, Origen had invited his reader to follow Christ’s disposition that willingly had accepted death.³⁴³ There is no evidence that Origen’s exhortation to the imitation of Christ included an imitation of the historical elements of Christ’s life.

The ascetics incorporated the notion of “imitating” Christ in their ethical discourses. Such imitation did not address the stages of spiritual ascension or the union between the soul and the divine. According to Burton-Christie for the ascetics, the ascetical exhortation to imitation included the presence of Christ’s humility within the ascetic self.³⁴⁴ For Keller, the Christocentric core of such an exhortation to humility made Christ tangible for the ascetics.³⁴⁵ Humility was the link connecting

³³⁹ See ‘Imitation du Christ’, *DSP* 7, 1536-1601.

³⁴⁰ *Apophth. (SysC)*, 1.37: “Ὅρος χριστιανοῦ μίμησις Χριστοῦ”.

³⁴¹ See Origen, *Annotationes in Exodum*, PG 12,1453: “[Ὁ]μοίωσις ἐστὶν ἡ διὰ τῶν ἀγαθῶν πράξεων μίμησις. Διόπερ οὐ τοῖς ἀμαρτάνουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς κατορθοῦσιν ἐξομοιοῦται ὁ Κύριος” (being according to the likeness is the imitation through good deeds. So that the Lord is assimilated, not to the sinners but to those achieving it). Maximus, *Thal.* 10 [PG 90, 288D]: “Οἱ δὲ τῆς θεωρητικῆς ἤδη μυστικῶς ἀξιοθέντες θεολογίας καὶ πάσης φαντασίας ὑλικῆς τὸν νοῦν καθαρὸν καταστήσαντες καὶ εἰκόνα τῆς θείας ὠραιότητος ὄλην ἀνελλιπῶς φέρουσιν τὴν ἐκμίμησιν, ἔστωσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀγαπῶντες” (Those that mystically have become worthy of the *theoretiké* theology already constituting the nous pure from every material imagination and an image of the divine beauty, bearing the imitation unceasingly, those lovers stand among us).

³⁴² Cf. 1 Cor. 11:1. Origen, *Fragmenta in Lamentationes*, 116.47 [pg 277 in GCS 6].

³⁴³ Origen, *Commentarium in Evangelium Matthaei*, 20, 17-19 [pg 462 in GCS 40]

³⁴⁴ Burton-Christie, ‘The Humble Way’, 236-260.

³⁴⁵ Keller, ‘Humility’, 131-155. Gregory, *Beat.* 1.82.20ff. For the reason that it was impossible for the individual to imitate God in his perfection, Gregory envisaged imitation as the participation in his humility which he immediately related to Christ’s *kenosis* (cf. *ibid.*, 1.84.9): “δοκεῖ μοι πτωχεῖαν πνεύματος, τὴν ἐκούσιον ταπεινοφροσύνην ὀνομάζειν ὁ Λόγος [*sic*]. Ταύτης δὲ ὑπόδειγμα τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ πτωχεῖαν ὁ Ἀπόστολος ἡμῖν λέγων προδείκνυσιν, ὅς δι’ ἡμᾶς ἐπτώχευσε πλούσιος ὢν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχεῖα πλουτήσωμεν. Ἐπεὶ οὖν τὰ ἄλλα πάντα, ὅσα περὶ τὴν θείαν καθορᾶται φύσιν, ὑπερπίπτει τῷ μέτρῳ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως· ἡ δὲ ταπεινότης συμφορῆς τις ἡμῖν ἐστὶ” (the Word [*sic*] seems to me to be using the words ‘poor in spirit’ to mean ‘voluntary humility’. The model of this is indicated by the Apostle when he speaks of the humility of God, ‘who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we by his poverty might become rich’. Every other aspect of the divine nature exceeds the limits of human littleness, whereas humility has a natural affinity with us) [trans. Hall]. Gregory reversed the Platonic position: kinship with God was not viewed in terms of the soul’s natural majesty, but by means of the soul’s participation in God’s *kenotic* humility. Cf. 2 Cor 8:9. Phil 2:5-7. See Meredith, ‘Plato’s “Cave”’, 49-61. Presently, Gregory

Christ and the ascetics. As Burton-Christie put it, “in pursuing humility, (the ascetics) were attempting to realize in their own lives the call to self-emptying exemplified in the words and witness of Jesus”.³⁴⁶ The presence of humility had deeper implications for the ascetical life: humility was presented in the dialectical terms of the cross and resurrection, poverty and glorification. It was only through self-emptying that humility could be achieved. This notion of self-emptying, poverty and the presence of the cross was close to the Christological motif of *kenosis*.³⁴⁷ For the ascetics, humility meant more than the mere positive disposition of the soul in trials and temptations: according to Burton-Christie, what stood at the centre of humility was Christ’s cross, his obedience to the Father and his self-emptiness that led to death. Yet, his death also led to the resurrection. The ascetics were called to participate in his death and glorification.

The theme of the ‘imitation of Christ’, and the participation in his death and resurrection, was not employed by Evagrius.³⁴⁸ It was Macarius that gave the theme its proper place within Christian ascetical theory. Macarius exhorted his fellow-ascetics to the imitation of Christ: Christ had left his divine glory and condescended to trials and death. His exhortation established the link between Christ’s cross and the ascetical trials:

The soul that is following the word of the Lord ought to take up the cross of the Lord with joy, as it has been written, that is to say, all things readily on behalf of the Lord, who experienced temptation, whether secret or visible and to have the hope always in the Lord. For it is in his power to try the soul that he has *withdrawn* and also to redeem from every temptation and trial for him.³⁴⁹

Macarius introduced a link between the notion of the imitation of Christ and the concept of divine *withdrawal*: the soul has lifted her cross. This cross entails the presence of ethical afflictions. Macarius placed divine “power” at the centre of his

has alluded to Plato’s cave in 84.18: “ὁ τῆς κτίσεως Κύριος ἐν σπηλαίῳ κατάγεται” (the Lord of all creation lodges in a cave) [trans. idem].

³⁴⁶ Burton-Christie, ‘The Humble Way’, 236.

³⁴⁷ Keller and Burton-Christie examined the notion of humility as sharing in Christ’s sufferings in the desert tradition. Thus, they drew the connection between humility and *kenosis*. See Keller, ‘Humility: Making Christ Tangible’, in *Oasis of Wisdom*, 131-155. Burton-Christie, ‘The Humble Way of Christ’, in *The Word*, 236-260. Ramfos, ‘Humility: Withdrawal from Being’, in *Pelican in the Wilderness*, 183-195.

³⁴⁸ However, Evagrius was not lacking references to the centrality of the cross for the ascetical life. Cf. Evagrius, *Ad Eulogium*, 6 [PG 79, 1101]. Idem, *Orat.* 17 [PG 79, 1172]. Idem, *De Vitiis quae Opposita sunt Virtutibus*, 3 [PG 79, 1144].

³⁴⁹ Macarius, *Typs.*, 9.1: “[ὁ]φείλει ὁδὴν ἢ ψυχὴν ἢ τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἐξακολουθοῦσα “τὸν σταυρὸν” τοῦ κυρίου αἰρεῖν μετὰ χαρᾶς, ὡς γέγραπται, τουτέστιν ἐτοιμῶς ἔχειν ὑπομένειν διὰ τὸν κύριον πάντα ἐπερχόμενον πειρασμὸν εἴτε κρυπτόν εἴτε φανερόν, καὶ εἰς τὸν κύριον ἀποκρέμασθαι τῇ ἐλπίδι πάντοτε, ὅτι ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ θλιβῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν παραχωρουμένην ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ἀπολυτρωθῆναι παντός πειρασμοῦ καὶ θλίψεως”.

passage, indicating that trials and also redemption lied within this power. Such power, according to Macarius, was established on the fact that Christ manifested himself to the soul both in “poverty” and “glory”. The interaction between Christ’s glory and poverty took place within the ascetical interaction between spiritual rest and ethical trials. In Burton-Christie’s words,

Jesus Christ was the model of humility par excellence for the monks. The endurance of afflictions, insults, trials, and dishonor for the sake of Christ, one of the signs of blessedness in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:10-12), was an important ideal for those living in the desert, and an expression of humility. However, it is Christ’s own example of humility- his *kenosis* of self-emptying (Phil. 2)- whose shadow falls most dramatically across the *Sayings*.³⁵⁰

Thus, Macarius presented Christ’s model of humility in the dialectical terms of Christ’s suffering and his glorification. But this dialectical interaction was extended to the life of the ascetics. They also experienced poverty (i.e. trials) and glorification (i.e. divine grace):

You need to be co-crucified with the crucified, suffer with the sufferer, so that you will be co-glorified with the glorified.³⁵¹

The Lord has shown himself to her in two persons: in his wounds and in the glory of his light. And the soul sees the sufferings which he suffered for her, and she contemplates the brilliance of his divine glory... advancing in both the persons, in that of the sufferings and in that of the glorious light.³⁵²

Christ was known to the soul in two manners: i.e. in his poverty and glory. The first referred to his trials;³⁵³ the latter, to his glory. Christ illustrated his poverty in sufferings. But he also manifested his divine glory. The notion of following after Christ’s sufferings was established in soteriological terms: Christ suffered for the human race. This sacrifice was passed to the spiritual life of the ascetical soul. According to Macarius, Christ condescended to human conditions because of his love for humanity. Then, for Macarius, the soul needed to correspond to Christ’s sacrifice by suffering for Christ’s love.³⁵⁴ Macarius concluded his thought by introducing the Pauline hymn of Christ’s *kenosis*.³⁵⁵ In doing so, Macarius illustrated the interaction between Christ’s sacrifice and the ethical life of the soul.

³⁵⁰ Burton-Christie, *The Word*, 240. Cf. Macarius, *Serm.* 55.4.3ff.

³⁵¹ Macarius, *Hom.* 12.1ff.

³⁵² Macarius, *Typs.* 3.3: “[δ]είκνυσιν αὐτῇ ἑαυτὸν ὁ κύριος ἐν δυοῖν προσώποις, ἐν τε τοῖς στίγμασιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ φωτός αὐτοῦ, καὶ θεωρεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ τὰ πάθη, ἃ ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ἔπαθεν, θεωρεῖ δὲ καὶ τὴν ὑπέρλαμπρον δόξαν τοῦ ἐνθέου φωτός αὐτοῦ... καὶ ἐν ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς προσώποις προκόπτουσα, ἐν τε τῷ τοῦ πάθους καὶ ἐν τῷ τοῦ ἐνδόξου φωτός”.

³⁵³ Is 53:2-6.

³⁵⁴ Macarius, *Typs.* 3.3.

³⁵⁵ Phil 2:6-7.

Macarius fully employed the Pauline interaction between *kenosis* and glorification. He placed the cross at the heart of Christian life, as a symbol of spiritual suffering in love.³⁵⁶ The life of the ascetics was an extension of Christ's *kenosis* in the incarnation.³⁵⁷ His language was that of glorification through poverty, and humility through endurance in trials.³⁵⁸ There is no evidence that the ascetics treated Christ's abandonment on the cross as the climax of his *kenosis*. The ascetics did not refer directly to a "Christ-like" model of abandonment either. Nevertheless, the image of the suffering Christ was standing at the centre of the thought of authors such as Macarius and also Isaac of Syria. This image of the suffering Christ informed their ethical theory and anticipated the modern theological approach that envisaged the ascetical experience as an expansion of Christ's redemptive sacrifice on the cross.

³⁵⁶ Ga 6:14.

³⁵⁷ Macarius, *Typs.* 6.4.

³⁵⁸ Macarius, *Hom.* 3.3ff.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the role that the motif of divine abandonment played in the Patristic thought of late antiquity. The main questions that the thesis looked at were: i) the “normativeness” of the experience of divine abandonment in spiritual life; and ii) the degree to which the Patristic thought could have presented a “Christ-like” model of abandonment.

The first part traced the origin of the motif of divine abandonment in the religious literature of the Near East. The motif was not associated with sin and chastisement: the lamentation psalms did not identify the cause of the abandonment. However, they introduced the connection between divine abandonment and distressful conditions. It was only in times of trials that the devotee felt that God had turned his face away from him; God did not intervene to spare his devotee from attacking enemies.

Origen was the first Christian author to appreciate fully the religious value of the *Song of Songs* for the Christian spiritual life. Origen discerned the motif of abandonment as an integral part of the *Song of Songs*. Thus, he highlighted the dialectical character of divine presence and absence. For Origen, the dialectical relation between divine presence and absence was a theological device that highlighted i) divine *paideia* and ii) eschatology. Divine abandonment was viewed within the scope of divine *paideia*: God instructed the soul, leading the latter to her ethical fulfilment. Divine *paideia* instructed the soul about her nature: the soul realised her immanent weakness. But also, divine abandonment illustrated the eschatological orientation of history. God was leading soul to her final fulfilment. However, this fulfilment remained only a promise. The soul’s present ethical trials introduced her to the reality of her final union with the divine. However, Origen left the time of this final union open by pointing to the Second Coming.

Despite the fact that Gregory of Nyssa did not always follow Origen in his exegesis, he maintained the centrality of the motif. Gregory incorporated his theological position on abandonment within a broader scheme of Christian anthropology. He maintained the dissociation between abandonment and sin, and indicated that the experience of abandonment was an intellectual experience: the soul was introduced to the depths of divine incomprehensibility. Despite the positive assertions that derived from Gregory’s optimism about spiritual life, the fact remains

that, at the summit of spiritual life, Gregory introduced a sudden discrepancy that caught the soul off her guard. Gregory rejected the Origenist possibility of the soul's ethical backsliding. Nevertheless, he maintained the same eschatological direction as Origen: distressful conditions occurred even at the summit of spiritual perfection. This was due to the distinction between the acquisition of virtues in this life, and the soul's ethical fulfilment in the future.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus belonged to the generation of exegetes that, unlike Origen and Gregory, were in direct contact with the developing ascetical communities of late antiquity. By the time Theodoret composed his commentary, Evagrius had already introduced his refined ascetical thought in the Egyptian desert. Despite the fact that Theodoret was affiliated with Syriac asceticism, his exegesis on the *Song* did not remain in great uniformity with the current desert anthropology. Theodoret's exegetical viewpoints on abandonment were not part of his anthropology. Theodoret touched vaguely upon the theme of abandonment in terms that recall the Evagrian-Macarian argument: the common point between Theodoret and the Desert asceticism was the notion that divine abandonment was defined as divine consent in trials: God did not intervene in distressful conditions. It remains uncertain whether or not Theodoret had direct access to the Evagrian tradition when arguing for abandonment at a level of precaution. It was only in an obscure passage that he mentioned the link between abandonment and human frailty. Theodoret introduced the notion of *slothfulness*, not, however, as a technical term. He maintained that the experience of abandonment was linked to divine *paideia* and led to spiritual perfection. Theodoret approached Christ's suffering and the abandonment of the soul from the same perspective: the definition of abandonment as "divine consent" led Theodoret to show the prominence of divine providence both in Christ's experience of human weakness, and in the ethical trials of the soul.

Finally, Nilus was the exegete who looked at the *Song of Songs* as the means by which he could instruct his fellow ascetics. The notion of abandonment was incorporated within an anthropology that, unlike Origen and Gregory, viewed spiritual life from the soul's point of view. The soul was not secure in her spiritual journey. *Laxity* and *pride* appeared as parasites of virtue. Despite the fact that the incarnation played the most important role in his work – Nilus maintained more Christological elements than any other exegete – he viewed the spiritual life in terms of the soul's response to the divine call through her ethical efforts. In doing so, Nilus

exhorted his addressees (i.e. fellow ascetics) to spiritual vigilance. He was the only author to introduce the motif of abandonment in terms of divine chastisement. Despite the fact that Nilus asserted that the bride introduced the groom to her inner chamber, the anthropology that permeated his exegesis weakened his optimism: *pride* was a parasite of virtue that God remedied through abandonment. The experience of abandonment in terms of chastisement showed the way in which God led the soul to perfection. Most importantly, Nilus was of one mind with his exegetical predecessors that the soul experienced ethical trials even at the level of spiritual maturity.

Gregory and Nilus presented the most technical commentaries. The terms they used were the fruit of a long development in Byzantine theological (Trinitarian debates) and ascetical thought (desert tradition), respectively. Origen and Theodoret drew the lines in which other exegetes could follow. Despite their many theological differences, personal exegetical presuppositions, diverse exegetical viewpoints – evident in their stylistic divergence, and the differing degrees in which they used technical terms – the Patristic commentators showed that at the summit of spiritual perfection, the soul experienced a sudden shift in her relationship with the divine that caught her by surprise. The commentators illustrated such a surprise in terms of grief and a transitory despair. What all commentators agreed on was the fact that, even at a mature level of spiritual perfection, the soul remained subject to trials and temptations. However, they left it to be inferred that, at her spiritual maturity, the soul knows how to deal with such distressful conditions.

The second part showed the reluctance with which Patristic literature approached the interpretation on Mt 27:46. From the time of Irenæus onwards, it was only within the context of theological polemics that the Patristic sources discussed the loud cry on the cross.

The two main problems that Patristic literature encountered while addressing Christ's loud cry was i) the maintenance of his ethical purity and ii) the protection of his unique identity. In the Christological context, divine abandonment was dissociated to the notion of divine *paideia*. It was linked to sin and became synonymous with the separation between God and human race after the fall. When viewed in these terms, it was felt to be inappropriate to apply divine abandonment to Christ, owing to Christ's ethical purity. Thus, Patristic literature progressively developed an understanding of the results of sin that could maintain Christ's ethical

purity without diminishing the reality of his humanity. However, abandonment as a result of the fall was not associated by any means with the notion of divine *paideia*.

Though Jouassard focused on the distinction between “realism” and “typology”, it seems that the real distinction in Patristic literature concerning the way that Christ experienced abandonment was between a position interpreting Mt 27:46 in terms of “separation” and the idea that Mt 27:46 expressed a faithful prayer.

The notion of “separation” led Patristic literature to a dead-end: the subject and the object of the experience remained obscure. During the Arian controversies, it was left to be implied that it was Christ’s divinity that was separated from the humanity. Only Gregory of Nyssa and Epiphanius indicated that the loud cry referred to the separation between the soul and the body. But even this position could not explain the fact that, in his loud cry, Christ addressed God. Gregory was firm that the divinity was never separated by the body. When Christ’s natures were viewed in more concrete terms (Nestorianism), it implied that there were two active subjects in Christ: the Logos abandoned the man Jesus. Patristic literature rejected this position in the condemnation of Nestorius’ divisive Christology.

It was Origen that established a paradigmatic understanding of the loud cry on the cross. Basil exploited it, and Theodoret gave it its most precise expression: he applied the Origenist-Cappadocian position to the relationship between the Logos and his humanity. The Logos gave his consent to trials, i.e. death. His humanity was left subject to human weakness. And, in her turn, the humanity showed its deified character. Though Theodoret did not argue in these terms, the theology of Maximus and John Damascene developed the Patristic thought on these lines. Maximus argued for a distinction between humanity *qua* humanity, and deified humanity. He fully exploited the notion that divinity gives way (accommodates) to the humanity to enable it to experience its natural weakness. But, this humanity was also deified. Thus, human weakness was overcome. The main conclusion that Patristic literature drew was that Christ experienced what it was to be human, i.e. human weakness. The argument never proceeded the other way around: i.e. the devotee was not undergoing Christ’s experience.

The third part shed more light on to Origen’s thought concerning divine abandonment. It showed that, for Origen, divine abandonment was a spiritual norm: ethical trials were followed by spiritual rest. For Origen, it was the martyrs that were

the ethical models for the faithful: through their sacrifice, the martyrs participated in the passion and also the resurrection of Christ.

The Athanasian point that dismissed ethical trials after the acquisition of divine grace was put side by side with the Antonian notion of divine visitations and ethical tribulations. These two authors expressed two traditions that were not necessarily contrasting: the first argued in terms of the efficacy of the divine grace through the works of the incarnation. However, the second position highlighted ethical realism indicating the possibility of ethical backsliding. Thus it exhorted to ethical vigilance and spiritual efforts.

It was also observed that the ascetical literature of late antiquity included a discussion of divine abandonment as part of divine providence. It was through abandonment that God led and instructed the soul. Even when the ascetical literature distinguished between “kinds” of abandonment, this was not in terms of different types of abandonment. The two “kinds” highlighted divine providence and human responsibility, respectively.

Also divine abandonment was a device to show the interaction between the ethical life and the life of contemplation. It was both at an ethical and also eschatological level that divine abandonment was envisaged as a spiritual norm: i) at an ethical level, the motif highlighted the possibility of ethical backsliding due to occurring trials. But also, still at an ethical level, the motif of abandonment was associated with the most subtle of vices, *pride*. ii) The motif maintained the eschatological anticipation of an ethical fulfilment. God presented the ascetics with the reward waiting for them. He withdrew his presence leaving the ascetics subject to trials in order to stir their desire for ethical fulfilment.

Finally, the concept of the “imitation of Christ” as an ethical example was examined. The ascetical literature did not address this imitation in terms of external types of Christ’s life. The term was closely connected to the notion of the humanity being “after the divine likeness”. In an ethical level, the “imitation” addressed Christ’s humility. It was through the acquisition of humility that the ascetics were making “Christ tangible”. It was in these terms that the ascetics related Christ’s *kenosis* to the ascetic soul by indicating Christ’s poverty and the progressive withdrawal of the ascetics from the society and the human-self. This poverty was understood as the ascetical disposition to accept this withdrawal.

To conclude, the two main themes that permeated the Patristic discussion concerning divine abandonment were i) divine *paideia* and ii) the eschatological message of the Christian faith. It is through interchanging periods of rest and trials that God instructs the soul, remedies her natural weakness and leads her to ethical fulfilment. It is within this context of *paideia* and eschatology that the Eastern ascetical tradition and the Western spiritual thought might approach and understand their common Patristic roots.

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